

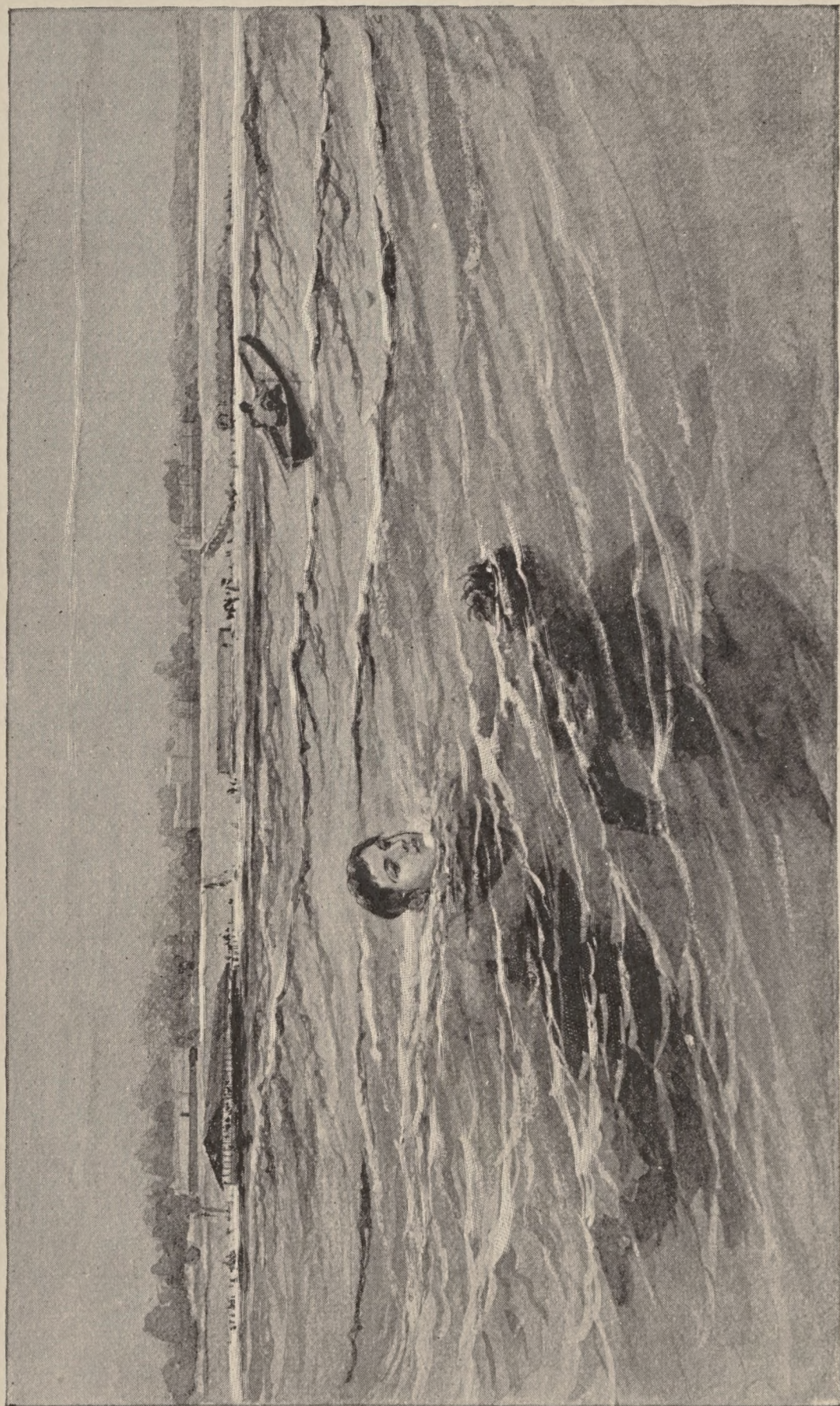
HONEST NED



• EDWARD • S • ELLIS •







Melton shot toward him like a flash, and caught his hair.

BRAVE AND HONEST SERIES. No. 2

HONEST NED

BY

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"BRAVE TOM," "RIGHTING THE WRONG," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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HONEST NED.

CHAPTER I.

ON a certain warm, sunshiny morning in the month of August, the house of Shipman & Gumbridge was struck by a thunderbolt.

Let me explain : —

The firm was and is to-day one of the richest and best-known houses in Maiden Lane, New York City. The stock of diamonds and jewelry carried by them runs well up into the hundreds of thousands; and they have gone through many a panic, and emerged as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar. They are known not only throughout the United States, but in the leading cities of Europe, where their credit has always stood at the highest point.

Some months previous to the falling of the thunderbolt, the house received from an Amsterdam firm one of those rare gems known as black diamonds. It had been taken from the Kimberley mines in South Africa, and, being several carats in weight, of spotless brilliancy,

and of the first water, its value was great. There are a number of such diamonds in existence, both in this country and across the Atlantic. The Holland house, believing there was a better chance of securing a big price for the gem in America, sent it to Shipman & Gumbridge, after it had been carefully cut, with the request to them to see what could be done with it.

It was a magnificent stone, though such a contrast in color to the ordinary diamond that only one of those who have enough surplus wealth to indulge every whim could be expected to buy it. The price was fixed at thirty thousand dollars.

The black diamond attracted a great deal of admiration and curiosity. It was displayed in the large show window of the firm, and day after day a group gathered in front and feasted their eyes on the extraordinary sight. At night, as a matter of course, it was securely locked, with the rest of the precious stuff, in the massive safe, strong enough to laugh at a regiment of burglars.

By and by the right man came along. He was a millionaire, who owned a fast yacht, a stable of blooded horses, and made life one grand holiday. He was engaged to the daughter of a multi-millionaire, and had overwhelmed her with so many presents, that he was racking his brain to find something new. He found it in the black diamond.

When Mr. Gumbridge named the price, the young man seemed disappointed that it was so small. He turned the gem over once or twice in his hand, held it up to the light, and then at varying distances from the eye. Mr. Gumbridge, who stood behind the case watching him, was quick to recognize him as an expert in diamonds. He handed him the magnifying glass, and invited him to step to the light, that he might give it the closest possible inspection.

"It is flawless," observed the caller, passing the stone back a few minutes later; "how many carats?"

"Not quite four."

"It strikes me that that is a small price for such a curiosity."

"It is precisely what I consider it worth."

Mr. Gumbridge knew before the gentleman spoke that he could obtain forty thousand dollars from him as easily as he could half that sum; but nothing could tempt him to break a law that had governed the firm from the day of its birth. It was their rule to fix the price upon whatever was for sale by them. This was never of a fancy nature, but was what was honestly believed to be fair, and under no circumstances was it varied from to the extent of a penny. They would as soon think of giving away a necklace of diamonds as to add to or take from its price.

It did once happen that a "previous" clerk obtained

three hundred dollars for a ring which was marked in the usual cabalistic way as worth but two hundred and fifty. Believing he had done a smart thing, he reported the matter to Mr. Gumbridge.

"You have the gentleman's address?" inquired the junior partner quietly.

"He gave it as the Windsor Hotel, but like enough he was yarning," replied the youth flippantly. "He was half full when he was here, and I believe I could have got another fifty out of him; clean gone on some actress, I guess."

"Put on your hat, engage a cab, and drive at once to the Windsor. The cost of the cab you will pay yourself. If you find the gentleman at the Windsor, hand him back the fifty dollars, with the best explanation you can make, provided it is a truthful one, obtain a receipt from him, and bring it to me."

The youth was dumfounded, but he knew there was nothing for him to do but to follow orders.

"Well, if he isn't the crankiest old foggy I ever saw!" muttered the clerk, as he climbed into a cab and gave directions to the driver; "he and Shipman are slow, and I can't understand how they ever got such a big business. Shouldn't wonder if they're in a shaky condition and will go under before long; I hope that chap isn't at the Windsor."

But the gentleman was there. The employee found

him in his room, displaying the ring to a couple of his admiring friends. The caller explained as best he could. He said there had been a mistake in the price charged, for which he wished to apologize, and to return him the excess of fifty dollars.

“Well, now, that’s what I call square dealing,” commented the gentleman; “I shall recommend Shipman & Gumbridge to my acquaintances as the right kind of people to deal with.”

The clerk began to see how it was his employers had built up such a substantial and lucrative trade. He thanked the gentleman for his good opinion, hoped the house would always merit it, and, folding the receipt and placing it in his pocket, hurried out and entered the waiting cab, which deposited him at the store within the following half-hour.

Mr. Gumbridge called him into his office.

“Did you find him?”

“Oh, yes; he was there, sober as a judge, and quite pleased with what we did. I don’t want to be impertinent, Mr. Gumbridge, but it seems to me you just as good as threw away” —

“You are impertinent, sir,” interrupted the gentleman, extending his hand for the receipt, which he inspected through his eye-glasses.

“It’s all right,” he said; “and now here is something for you.”

The clerk took a small envelope, opened it, and found that it contained his salary to the close of the week.

“Why — what — how is this?” he asked, with a vague suspicion of the real meaning.

“It means that we have no further need of your services; you are discharged.”

“But — but — sir — I — hope” —

“You can make no explanation,” said the elder gentleman, rising to his feet, removing his glasses, and looking sternly at him; “you knew my orders; you deliberately broke one; you disobeyed me: good-day, sir.”

This instance, I repeat, was the only one of its kind that ever occurred in the history of the firm of Shipman & Gumbridge. It will serve to make clear Mr. Gumbridge’s refusal to vary in the price of the black diamond, or to accept the hint of asking more for it.

“All right,” responded the gentleman, “you ought to know your own business best; I’ll take it.”

“Very well; shall I send it to you?”

“No; I’ll give you my check for the amount, and leave the stone here until to-morrow afternoon; I have to go to Philadelphia this evening, and it will be safer with you than with me.”

“As you please,” replied Mr. Gumbridge, who was

pleased with the proposition, inasmuch as it allowed him, without any questioning on his part, to keep the stone in his possession until he learned whether the check was good.

The gentleman drew a small, narrow book from an inner coat pocket, stepped to the desk behind the case, filled it out, passed it to the diamond broker, who in turn gave him a receipt for the amount, and then, bidding him good-day, passed out of the store, and entered his waiting carriage.

Mr. Gumbridge's next act was to send his clerk with the check to the bank on which it was drawn. The teller gave one searching glance at it, and, in answer to the question of the caller, said: —

“That signature is good for ten times that amount any day.”

This being duly reported to Mr. Gumbridge, he deposited it in his own bank, put the black diamond in his safe, and then thought no more about it, other matters claiming his attention. The next morning he reached the store a few minutes after his clerk, and proceeded to open his safe. While his assistant was removing the trays with their precious load, he opened one of the small drawers, and took out the little package of silky diamond paper. It was that which was the receptacle of the black diamond the day before. One look was sufficient. The stone was gone!

And that is what I meant when I said that on a certain warm, sunshiny morning in the month of August, the house of Shipman & Gumbridge was struck by a thunderbolt.

CHAPTER II.

ADONIJAH SHIPMAN, the senior partner of the well-known firm of diamond brokers and jewelers, had been absent several months with his family in Europe at the time of the startling incident just related. He expected to be away until autumn, so that affairs were entirely in the hands of the junior member, who was about sixty years of age, of slight stature, and nervous manner.

There were three employees of the firm, whose duty it was to report daily at the store, except, of course, when one or more of them was away on his vacation. The oldest was Ash Gibbons, about one and twenty years of age; James McCutcheon, two years younger; and Edmund Melton, who was barely eighteen. The firm evidently believed in young blood; but each one of the three named had been in their employ from early boyhood. The duties of the three clerks kept them within the store through the day, except when absent for a brief while on special business; while it need hardly be said that the firm had agents known throughout the country, and who traversed it from ocean to ocean; but with them we have nothing to do. The

explanation I am making it is necessary for the reader to keep in mind, in order to understand the incidents that follow.

Each of the three young men received two weeks' vacation every summer, arranging it among themselves, so that only one was absent at a time. On the morning that the loss of the black diamond was discovered, Edmund Melton had been away just one week at a seaside resort in New Jersey, and it was fixed that on his return McCutcheon was to take his place, Gibbons being the last to enjoy his play spell. But McCutcheon had been ill at home for a couple of days, and did not return to the store until some hours after the discovery, when he sauntered in, looking pale and out of sorts. Thus it was that Mr. Gumbridge and his clerk Gibbons were the only parties in the place when the young millionaire bought the black diamond, and when its loss was detected by the junior member of the firm.

It should be stated further that each of the three clerks knew the combination by which the great safe opened, and they had all swung back its ponderous doors many a time. Their employers gave them their unreserved confidence. Any one acquainted with the thorough system of espionage in Maiden Lane, by means of the electrical system of alarm, policemen, and special watchmen, not to mention the prodigious strength of the safes in which the valuable stuff is

kept, need not be told how impossible it is for a gang of the most expert cracksmen infesting London and New York to make any headway there with their tools. Other fields are too inviting for the burglar to waste his efforts in Maiden Lane.

Now, Mr. Wilton Gumbridge would not have lost any sleep because of the vanishment of thirty thousand dollars, though naturally it would have annoyed him to some extent. He was wealthy and liberal; but he was struck almost breathless by the knowledge that something had been stolen from his safe. He remembered distinctly wrapping the diamond in the soft white paper used for such purposes, and placing it in the small drawer, where of course it should have remained until he removed it. Although it was impossible for it to fall out of itself, he made a minute examination of the interior, hoping against hope that it had slipped out in some unaccountable way.

The gentleman did not speak while thus engaged; but his clerk Gibbons quickly saw, from his agitated manner, that something was wrong. He remained quiet a few minutes, and then, hearing the gentleman utter a half-suppressed exclamation, he inquired respectfully,—

“Is there anything amiss, sir?”

Instead of answering, Mr. Gumbridge asked, —

“Are there any articles missing from the trays? Please examine them carefully.”

The clerk did as requested, and a few minutes later answered, —

“I do not find anything missing, sir.”

“I fail to find the black diamond which I sold yesterday.”

As he spoke he watched the countenance of his employee closely. The expression of wonder and doubting dismay that passed over it was too marked to be feigned. Had he not known that the elder gentleman never indulged in a joke, he would have believed he was essaying a little one now. Gibbons could only stare in bewilderment for a moment, when he half whispered, —

“I — don’t — understand — it.”

“Nor I either ; at present it is a mystery beyond my ken.”

“Isn’t it possible that you dropped it on the floor ?” asked the clerk, looking about the feet of the gentleman, and then stooping down and peering under the safe ; “or perhaps it is inside.”

“It is neither,” said Mr. Gumbridge quietly ; “or rather I should say, inasmuch as it must be either inside or outside, that it is not within the safe, nor was it there when I opened it a few minutes ago.”

The most natural thing in the world was for the gentleman to suspect his employee, since, it seemed, no one else could possibly have taken it ; but until now he

had not doubted the integrity of Gibbons, and though the young man was inclined to be somewhat sporting in his tastes, never before had there been a breath of suspicion against him. He was popular among his associates, the only one to take care of an invalid mother and crippled sister, and the last person in the world whom his friends would have suspected of dishonesty. But who among us is proof against temptation?

Mr. Gibbons would have been stupid had he not perceived the fearful case against him. He read it the instant he learned of the missing diamond. His suspicion, or rather belief, was confirmed by the action of his superior.

“Mr. Gumbridge,” he said, his face pale, but his nerves as cool as if he was referring to the most ordinary occurrence, “I perceive your thoughts; I own that the case against me looks bad, but I am innocent. However, I wish you to take every step necessary to prove that innocence; treat me as a thief until such proof is obtained.”

“From the bottom of my heart, I hope that proof will be speedily forthcoming, but we shall see.”

Mr. Gumbridge's course in the case of the disobedient clerk proved that he was not the one to falter before what he considered his duty. He was a man who rarely if ever showed agitation, and rarely spoke above his usual conversational tone.

“You will please place the articles in the window and show-cases, while I attend to some other business,” he said, stepping to the telephone which connected with the police office.

He quickly got his reply, and then sent his message, the words of which of course were heard by Gibbons, while he busied himself in putting the articles in their proper places for the day's business.

“Is Mr. Blowitz there?”

“No; but we expect him shortly.”

“Please send him to Burglar Alarm Company's office as soon as he arrives.”

“All right, sir.”

Mr. Gumbridge dropped the tube and walked back into the small room at the rear which served as his office. He did not speak to his head clerk, nor did the latter utter a word to him, but it need not be said that their thoughts were busy. Mr. Gumbridge sat a few minutes in deep meditation. Then he sprang up and put on his hat and hurried around to the office of the Burglar Alarm Company.

Addressing the gentleman on duty, he said, —

“I wish to learn whether any alarm came from my store last night.”

The gentleman consulted his register a moment and replied, —

“Yes, sir; there was such an alarm, or rather call.”

“Of what purport?”

“It was a signal to us to break the connection, as you wished to open your safe.”

Mr. Gumbridge was interested, but hardly surprised. Such visits from authorized parties to their stores were not infrequent. He had made one himself about a year before, when, forgetting to “call off” the alarm, he found a sturdy policeman on hand by the time he fairly got the doors of the safe open. Any one intending a theft would do just what had been done, in order to save himself from such an unpleasant call.

“At what hour did the word come to this office?”

The official ran his line along the entry, and replied: —

“At a quarter to one this morning. Jones was on duty last night; he will explain, if anything more is to be explained.”

“There is blessed little,” said the diamond broker, who turned to Jones, and made known what he wished to learn.

“Yes, sir,” said that individual; “I was on duty last night: at twelve forty-five there came a call from your store which I recognized as a request to us to sever the connection with your alarm, as you wished to open the safe for a few minutes. I did so, and within the following five minutes we received the notification that everything was all right and the safe was closed. Con-

nection was re-established, and we thought no more about it. Was it you who visited the store last night?"

"I rather think not," replied Mr. Gumbridge dryly.

"Has anything been taken?"

"The individual who honored you with his message over the wire last night, or rather early this morning, walked off with an article which I sold yesterday for thirty thousand dollars."

The men opened their eyes, as well they might.

"But," said Jones, "how came he to have the combination?"

"That is what I would be glad to know; I would be interested also to learn who he is."

At this juncture Detective Blowitz, one of the best-known and most skilled men in his profession, arrived. He was of slight stature, thin frame, bright eyes, and alert manner. He was an old acquaintance of the jeweler, and shook hands with him. Mr. Gumbridge knew his worth, and after a few minutes' chat asked the privilege of a private interview. The two passed back to the inner office, and sat down alone.

CHAPTER III.

It took Mr. Gumbridge but a few minutes to tell his story. Detective Blowitz listened quietly until it was finished, and then proceeded to ask a few sharp questions.

“You understand, of course, Mr. Gumbridge, that the real protection of your property rests in the safe. Nothing is easier than for a professional burglar to let himself through your front door and, walking to the rear, where you have your safe, open the wooden inclosure. But in doing that he must start the electric alarm, and presto! a policeman is on him before he can say Jack Robinson. Now, in the Holmes system and most of the others, the call sent over the wires asking them to sever the connection must be made at the regular time for opening. That is to say that, though it may be acceded to, if it should be sent five minutes earlier or later than the usual time, the Holmes folks will instantly send one of their men down to the store to make certain everything is right. Not until he has assured himself that it is so, will the visitor be left undisturbed; and it takes only five minutes to do that.

“In the system which you employ, the mere sending

of the alarm is sometimes, but not always, accepted, as the folks at the office suppose that call is only in the possession of the right parties; besides which, the safe, with its insurmountable combination, still confronts the illegal visitor. Your caller complied with these conditions, and, possessing the combination of your safe, walked off with the black diamond. How many persons besides yourself know the right call and the combination?"

"Each of my three clerks, — Edmund Melton, James McCutcheon, and Ashton Gibbons."

"What of Mr. Shipman?"

"He has them of course; but he is absent in Europe, and will not be back before next month."

"What clerks were with you in the store yesterday?"

"Only one, — Gibbons."

"Where was McCutcheon?"

"He has been home a couple of days sick."

"And Melton?"

"He has been off on his vacation for a week at Ocean Beach, New Jersey."

"It looks as if it was on Gibbons."

"I cannot see how the criminal can be any one else."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"I have always considered him one of the best and brightest clerks I ever had."

"Has he ever been under suspicion?"

"Never; nor indeed has either of my other clerks. I would rather lose the worth of the missing diamond than learn that Gibbons is a thief."

Detective Blowitz smiled faintly; and lighting a cigar, after offering his patron one, he swung one leg over the other, leaned back in his chair, and looked at the wall for a full minute, as if deeply meditating.

"I think," he said, with his hands clasped behind his head, and the cigar still in his mouth, "that Gibbons has the care of an invalid mother and sister."

"You are right; he is a model son and brother."

"How much salary do you pay him?"

"Forty dollars a week, and I meant to make it fifty on the first of next January."

"Very liberal pay — very liberal pay" —

"But he has been worth it all along," broke in Mr. Gumbridge, resenting even such a slight insinuation against his business judgment.

"Of course, of course, or you wouldn't pay it."

The detective smoked a moment more, and then said, —

"From what I have heard of him, he is about twenty-one years old; am I correct?"

"You are; he cast his first vote at the last spring election."

"And as to McCutcheon, what is his age?"

"He is about two years younger. He is of delicate

build, an expert penman, a faultless accountant, and a young man who is fully devoted to our interests. He has several brothers and sisters, and his parents are living, and in comfortable circumstances."

"What is his pay?"

"Thirty dollars a week."

"You are quite liberal, Mr. Gumbridge, but I am sure no more than you ought to be. He has been home sick for several days?"

"Yes; but he expects to return to-day."

"Yes," returned the detective musingly; "and as to Melton, what about him?"

"He is one of the brightest and best young men I ever knew; he has been with us four years, and I would not hesitate to intrust him with any amount."

"Have you ever done so?"

"I do it continually when he is with me."

"And he could skip with the precious stuff whenever he chooses?"

"It would be the easiest thing in the world; but he would sooner put his hand in the fire than do so."

"I hope you are right. May I ask what his salary is?"

"Ten dollars per week."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, snatching the cigar from his mouth, and looking keenly at his friend; "what does that mean?"

Mr. Gumbridge laughed as he replied, —

“I don’t wonder that you start. Melton is an orphan, without brother or sister. When he reaches his majority he will come into the possession of a comfortable estate ; but until then he is in charge of his uncle, Colonel Marcellus Bainbridge, who is his guardian, and who holds the reins pretty tightly over him. His nephew began in our store on ten dollars a week. My intention was to raise it as soon as he had been tested ; but when I spoke to Colonel Bainbridge he peremptorily forbade it. He gave as his reason his belief that it is a woful-mistake to allow young men to have control of too much money. He attributes the ruination of so many youths to that one fact. He informed me that under no circumstances was I to pay his nephew more than ten dollars a week until he reached the age of twenty-one, when, of course, he will be his own master. I had therefore no choice but to obey.”

“Colonel Bainbridge’s views of matters are strikingly original. What board is his nephew expected to pay out of his big weekly salary ? ”

“His uncle charges him three dollars a week for his board and lodging. He says every young man ought to pay that, even if his parents are millionaires ; but the colonel furnishes him with everything else, — clothing, pew-rent at church, his dues at the Y. M. C. A., and even his contributions to religious and charitable

objects. He considers that he is very liberal with him."

"How does the young man accept the situation?"

"So far as I see, with cheerfulness. He has never uttered a word of complaint in my hearing, attends to his duties faithfully, and is one of the best-natured boys I ever knew. It is a pleasure to have him come in the store, whistling softly, or humming some tune. He is a natural musician and a fine athlete; I confess, I am very fond of him, and I don't mind saying to you that I offered to increase his pay without the knowledge of his uncle. He thanked me, and shook his head, saying he could not consent; that he meant to obey his guardian in spirit and letter."

"A noble young man — a noble young man, but" —

Here Detective Blowitz brought down both feet on the floor with a thump; and, holding his cigar in his left hand, slowly shook his finger at the diamond broker, as if to emphasize each word, fixing the while his eyes upon the other's face.

"Mr. Gumbridge, you and Colonel Bainbridge are pursuing the one course that is certain to make a thief of young Melton. It may not be to-day nor to-morrow, nor next week or month; but sooner or later that promising young man will succumb to the temptation: my only wonder is that he has withstood it so long."

"I don't agree with you, sir," said Mr. Gumbridge stiffly.

"You may not agree with me, but my words are true all the same. In my judgment you and Colonel Bainbridge are compounding a felony, or rather, you are training a boy up to become a criminal."

"But what about this black diamond?" asked the caller curtly, as a reminder to the detective that he had wandered from the business upon which his advice was sought.

"Ah, yes ; we came near forgetting that. I presume the next thing that strikes you as proper is to arrest Gibbons?"

"What else can we do? though it is not to be supposed that he has forgotten to take precautions that will prevent our recovering the diamond."

"There is only one objection to arresting him, Mr. Gumbridge."

"What is that?"

"He is innocent."

"He is innocent! How can that be?"

"Because he was in my company from eleven last night until after one o'clock this morning. There were others with us, so he will have no trouble in proving an alibi."

"You amaze me! Who, then, is the thief?"

"I don't know, but I shall try to find out."

CHAPTER IV.

“LAST night,” continued Detective Blowitz, as he again crossed his legs, returned his cigar to his mouth, and leaned back in his chair, “I dropped in at the Manhattan Club; it was just eleven o’clock, and the first person to greet me was Gibbons. He was sitting at the table with two friends, whom he introduced me to. I sat down, and we got to talking, and kept it up until after one o’clock. Gibbons is a very companionable fellow, and there is no one with whom I more enjoy a chat than with him.

“Now, inasmuch as your safe was robbed between twelve and one o’clock this morning, and inasmuch as it can be proven that Gibbons was many blocks away at that hour, it may be said that he is eliminated from the problem before us.”

“There can be no questioning that fact, and it gives me a greater relief than I can express. I will go right round to the store and express my regrets,” added Mr. Gumbridge, rising to his feet.

“Wait a few minutes, please,” said the detective, motioning him to resume his seat, which he did; “I would have further word with thee. I am aware that

with the story-writers the professional detective is accustomed to explain all his plans, and lay bare all his thoughts, to every one with whom he talks for five minutes. I regret that I can't afford to do that; but I am following the rule of the business. Now, without saying what is in my mind, I want to get a little more information from you. In doing that, I must inevitably give way to some of the fancies that are running through my thoughts; but let me say that at this moment I have no more knowledge of the thief than has the man in the moon.

"But let us go back a little. Can you recall the name of the young man who bought the diamond and gave you his check therefor?"

"He signed the check, 'R. Field McFarlane.'"

"I know him; he is very wealthy, but so are some others who at this moment are rustivating in Canada. Now I beg you to recall all that took place when he was in your store yesterday."

"I see what is in your mind; you think he may have abstracted the diamond without my knowledge."

"I haven't said so."

"It isn't necessary; but he did not do as you suspect. I had the diamond in my hand after he left the store."

"Are you sure? Did you see it?"

"I think so."

"I don't want any thinking; I want positive knowledge."

"I am positive I had it in my hand after he went out."

"What makes you certain when you are not sure you saw it?"

"I folded it in the diamond paper after he handed it back to me, talked with him a few minutes, and, as he bade me good-day, I turned around and placed it in the drawer inside the safe."

"How soon after that did you close the safe?"

"Within the following five minutes; we shut up early at this season."

"Then Gibbons had no chance to take it from the safe yesterday afternoon?"

"Not the slightest; we left the store together and walked to the corner of Broadway, where he took an up-town car, and I went to my room at the Astor House, where I am staying while my family is in the country, except on Sundays, which I spend with them."

Mr. Gumbridge may have suspected what was passing in the mind of Detective Blowitz; but, if so, he was mightily mistaken. It was impossible for the detective not to think fast and hard while pursuing his investigations.

Had Mr. Gumbridge asserted that he had actually seen the black diamond after his purchaser turned his back to leave the store, that would have ended all probing in that line; but it is well known that crime has enlisted on its side, at all times, a subtle ingenuity and

a skill as marvelous as that which is arrayed against it. Suppose the late Heller or the present Hermann had stood in the place of the young millionaire, would the abstraction of the gem without the knowledge of the jeweler been more wonderful, or indeed as wonderful as scores of their exploits?

No doubt Mr. Gumbridge was confident that he had the stone wrapped in the diamond paper, and that he was equally certain he put it in the drawer inside his safe; but the detective did not consider the fact established beyond all possible mistake. Though Mr. McFarlane may have carried the black diamond away with him, it had been established that some one visited the store that evening after midnight, and called off the electrical connection.

But that was to be expected. It was not to be supposed that the young man personally would do it; but nothing was easier than to secure a trusty confederate to act for him. True, he must have had the peculiar call by which the sergeant at the police-office was made to believe everything was right; but that was not so difficult as might be supposed. Any early or late customer might have caught the peculiar signal without attracting suspicion to himself. He may have done it a week before, and he may have made several visits before catching it.

It was clear that McFarlane was to be looked after,

and Detective Blowitz arranged that he should occupy a seat in the store that afternoon when the gentleman called for his property. He wished to have a good look at him, and especially to note his manner during the interview.

But Detective Blowitz's thoughts did not rest upon this individual alone. There were two others whom he intended to investigate. The fact that the clerk McCutcheon had been home ill for a couple of days did not exclude him by any means from the problem. It was not impossible that his illness was feigned. If he was well enough to come to the store that day, he could have made a midnight visit to the place.

But it must be confessed that the gravest suspicion lay against young Melton, who was spending his vacation at a little seaside resort in New Jersey. One thing to be learned was whether he had left Ocean Beach the day before to come to New York, and, if so, when he returned. This knowledge could be easily obtained, and must have an important bearing on the perplexing question.

"I hope he did not come to the city," reflected the officer; "but if he has, it will be bad, and a man of business must know no sentiment. If Melton is the thief, his guardian is not wholly blameless."

Mr. Gumbridge now bade the officer good-day and went to his store.

When he arrived, he found his clerk Gibbons, who had arranged everything in order, seated on his chair, pale but composed. He looked searchingly at his employer, who, walking straight up to him, extended his hand.

“I beg your forgiveness, Ashton; it has been established that you are as innocent as I: I cannot tell you what a load has been lifted from my heart.”

The young man heaved a sigh, and with a glad smile asked, —

“How was the proof obtained?”

“You were at the Manhattan, I believe, last night, in company with Erastus Blowitz?”

“I was; how did you learn it?”

“He told me himself.”

“Where did you see him?”

“I met him while I was out, and he gave me the statement.”

It was on Mr. Gumbridge's tongue to say that Blowitz was the detective whom he had employed to ferret out the matter; but it occurred to him that that gentleman might not wish it known that he was a detective. Men of his profession often associate for months and years with their friends, without the latter learning their real calling, one of whose indispensable requisites is secrecy.

CHAPTER V.

BETWEEN two and three o'clock that afternoon, Detective Blowitz sauntered into the store of Shipman & Gumbridge, as though, finding himself in the vicinity, he had concluded to drop in for a little chat. He shook hands pleasantly with Mr. Gumbridge, who invited him to a seat in his office. On his way thither he stopped to speak with Clerk Gibbons. He made no reference to the trying incidents of the morning, but the radiant face of the young man told the fact that everything was right, so far as he was concerned.

The officer had hardly taken his seat and lit a cigar when McCutcheon, walking with the help of a cane, entered and greeted his employer and his associate. One look at his colorless face left no doubt that he was just recovering from a severe illness. Naturally he passed behind the counter and took a seat on one of the stools. He was not invited into the inner office, and had no suspicion that any one was there, nor did he once note that the door was open for an inch or so, and that a pair of ferret eyes were fixed upon him, as if they would read him through and through.

As a matter of course, he knew nothing about the

theft of the black diamond, and the incident was not told to him. Mr. Gumbridge, however, referred to the stone in an indirect way, and finally said that a gentleman had called to buy it the day before.

"I am glad of that; for the price was so high that I believed we would have to send it back to Amsterdam, or hold it a long while."

While McCutcheon was uttering these words, Detective Blowitz and Mr. Gumbridge kept their eyes riveted upon him, listening to the tones, and watchful of his manner. There was not the least indication that he suspected what had taken place.

"Thank Heaven!" thought his employer; "he is as innocent as Gibbons or I."

"He doesn't act like a guilty man," concluded the detective, withdrawing his gaze; "but we will suspend judgment, as the courts say."

McCutcheon lingered only a short while. He said he hoped to return to his post on the morrow; but his employer told him not to think of doing so until entirely well.

"Lie off the rest of the week; business is slow, and we won't take these few days out of your regular vacation."

"You are very kind," replied the grateful youth, rising slowly from his chair and leaning heavily on his cane as he passed out.

"I'll be back shortly," remarked Detective Blowitz, going quickly out of the door.

He thought it well to look after the young man for a few minutes.

"He may grow a little stronger when he is out of sight of the store," he said to himself, as he fell in behind him and graduated his pace to that of the convalescent.

But the officer saw no evidence of anything of the kind as the youth painfully made his way toward Broadway.

"I'd like to shadow him longer, but I mustn't miss McFarlane — I say Archer," he added in an undertone, as he came face to face with a stocky-looking young man; "have you anything on hand now?"

"Nothing except that matter this afternoon."

"Keep your eyes on that young chap ahead there with the cane; notice whether he holds that plodding gait; see where he goes, and observe whether he speaks to or meets any acquaintance on the road. Don't let him get out of your sight till he reaches his own home."

Archer nodded, to signify that the orders should be followed, and, turning about, Detective Blowitz went back to the store of Shipman & Gumbridge.

The long sultry August afternoon dragged slowly away, and, as evening approached, there were signs of a

violent storm gathering. Mr. Gumbridge grew impatient over the delay of his expected visitor, but the detective took it calmly. One of the necessities of the profession is an Esquimau-like patience which nothing can ruffle. He smoked and dozed, and read the papers, and was disposed to give up the matter as closing time approached.

There had been several calls, and among them a couple of purchasers, not to say anything of the postman and a messenger boy who brought a telegram from one of the agents of the house in St. Louis. Finally, when Mr. Blowitz was stretching and yawning for the twentieth time, R. Field McFarlane arrived.

The detective did not scruple to leave the door of the office wide open, though he sat well back. He had a good view of the caller, however, and noted his minutest manner. He was a gentleman at all times. He was dressed nattily, and, bidding Mr. Gumbridge good afternoon, said in his breezy way, —

“I am a little later than I anticipated; I got back from Philadelphia a little past noon, but had to go up town first: now, if you please, I will relieve you of my white-blackbird, thanking you for your kindness in taking care of it for me.”

And he drew forth his pocket-book, and extracted the receipt of the day before.

Standing behind the case, Mr. Gumbridge looked him steadily in the face, and asked, —

“Where did you stay when in Philadelphia?”

The gentleman showed his surprise at the question, but replied without hesitation, —

“At the Continental; may I inquire why you wish to know?”

“I might have telegraphed to you, had I known where to reach you, that the black diamond had been stolen from our safe.”

“Is it possible?” asked Mr. McFarlane; “I am sorry to hear that. Have you taken steps to recover it?”

“I have been thinking of doing so, but it is one of the most mysterious occurrences I ever knew.”

“Let me hear about it, if you have no objection.”

Mr. Gumbridge gave a brief account of what the reader has learned long ago. The gentleman listened with deep interest, and, when the story was concluded, remarked, —

“That is a curious proceeding. It looks as if I were not the only one who has a fancy for black diamonds, inasmuch as you tell me your visitor did not disturb anything else. Well, I hope you will find it again; for, now that it is missing, naturally I want it more than ever. Here is my card; please let me know when you recover it.”

And he turned about to go when Mr. Gumbridge stopped him.

"I cannot permit that ; the stone being lost, you owe me nothing. I withdrew your check from the bank, and here it is."

"I would prefer that you keep it for a week or two, at any rate, so as to give me a mortgage on the thing."

"That is contrary to my rules of business. I promise you that if it is found it shall be subject to your call."

"Very well ; as you prefer : and accepting the slip of paper, and returning the receipt, Mr. McFarlane bade the jeweler good-day, and passed out upon the street.

"Well, what do you think of him ? " asked the latter, walking back to where the smiling officer sat.

"He's a cool one, provided he is guilty."

"Pshaw ! he isn't guilty. How could he be ? "

"There isn't much of a case against him. Well, I have had a good look at him, and now I'll go."

Shortly after, Mr. Gumbridge, leaving his clerk to close the store, started at his deliberate gait in the direction of the Astor House.

Meanwhile the young man whom the detective had addressed as Archer (and whose full name was Josiah Archer), having completed his duty, went to the house of Detective Blowitz, where he was awaiting that gentleman when he arrived. His report was what was expected. James McCutcheon had been followed to his home. He had walked part of the way, but, finding the

exercise too severe for his strength, he took a car for most of the distance. He did not stop to speak to anyone, nor did he seem to attract any special attention on the journey. He went directly to his own home on Fifty-seventh Street. The young detective waited an hour on the outside; but the clerk did not reappear, and he believed he was there at that moment resting from his fatigue.

"Very well," quietly remarked the elder, when his report was finished; "now I want you to take the train to Ocean Beach, New Jersey, and hunt for a man named Edmund Melton. At this time of the year there are a good many trains running to the seaside, and as it isn't very late, you can catch one of them."

"And what if I find him there?"

"Ascertain whether he was in New York yesterday."

Detective Blowitz then related the account of the loss of the black diamond, adding that there was reason to suspect that young Melton was mixed up in it. He gave his assistant all the points necessary, and the young man left.

CHAPTER VI.

DESPITE Detective Blowitz's rigid training and his long experience, involving more than one pathetic incident in which the hearts of others were broken, he felt uncomfortable over the fact that the trail was unmistakably leading toward the young man who was enjoying his vacation at the seaside. The brief account he had received from Mr. Gumbridge had prepossessed him to a marked degree in favor of the youth. No lad could have been commended more highly, and none could be placed in a more dangerous situation than he, where, with great wealth at his command, he was forced to live upon a mere stipend.

"I have no doubt he has been obliged to save up for months in order to pay his expenses while on this brief outing. I hope there is no smell of fire about his garments, but I tremble for him."

While he had sent his assistant to investigate, Mr. Blowitz did not neglect a simple expedient within his reach. He went to the residence of Colonel Marcellus Bainbridge, and rang the bell.

"Is Colonel Bainbridge at home?" he asked of the servant who answered the call.

"No, sir; the family is now in the country."

"But Master Edmund is here, I believe."

"No, sir; he went away a week ago yesterday, and we don't expect him back for some time."

"But didn't I see him in town yesterday?" continued the detective, feigning surprise; "surely I could not have been mistaken."

"If he was in town, which I don't believe, sir, he wasn't near this house."

"How can you be sure of that? He might have let himself in with his key after you were all asleep."

The woman shook her head and compressed her lips.

"That couldn't be; my husband and I are the only ones who stay here at night, and we lock every door and fasten the window and set the burglar alarm. Is there anything the matter?" she abruptly inquired, awaking to the fact that this curiosity was somewhat strange.

"Oh, no, nothing at all; but I was so sure I saw him, that I was convinced you had made a mistake, but I see that it is impossible. I'm obliged for your kindness; good-day."

"He's a queer one," muttered the woman, standing in the door and watching the caller as he sauntered up the street; "it strikes me, now I come to think of it, that his questions were impudent, and he don't believe what I told him."

But Detective Blowitz did credit every word she said, and his heart was a great deal lighter as he walked up town.

“If young Melton was not in New York last night,” he concluded, “he is as well out of the scrape as is Gumbridge himself. Although it deepens the mystery, I am glad of it.”

But the detective could not quite free himself of the discomfort that had been growing upon him ever since the case came into his hands. If Edmund Melton was forgetful of his honor to that extent as to steal the black diamond, he was doubtless shrewd enough to cover his tracks well. Knowing that suspicion was likely to be turned toward him, he would not have stayed in his own home, nor allowed any of his friends to see him while in the city.

Mr. Blowitz was not an idle man when business was on hand. He had plenty of time at his disposal, and he improved it. He had told Archer to telegraph him the moment he learned the truth about Melton's suspected visit to New York, for the fact, either way, was so simple, that there ought to be little delay in ascertaining it. Blowitz expected to hear the news in the course of the evening.

His first task, after making his call at Colonel Bainbridge's, was to gather up the few remaining truths concerning young McCutcheon. Here he made better

progress than he expected. Learning where to go for his information, he found that the young man bore an excellent character (as did all the employees of Shipman & Gumbridge). He was a strict member of the church, had no bad habits so far as known, and was an active officer in a branch of the Y. M. C. A.

A special meeting of such officers as were in town was called the preceding evening at the house of McCutcheon, he sending a particular request for three friends to visit him, as the matter was one in which he was greatly interested. The gentlemen came, for they held the youth in too high regard to refuse him any favor that could be granted. Two of them remained away from their families at Long Branch on purpose to accommodate him.

It being the season of the year when the days are long, they did not reach McCutcheon's house until after nine o'clock. The night was warm, and they stayed a long time on the back porch talking with their esteemed friend. All became so interested in the matter before them, that McCutcheon's weakness was forgotten even by himself. When they started to go he detained them, and finally compelled all three to remain over night with him. The hour of retiring lacked but a few minutes of one o'clock. This all-important truth was established on the testimony of two of the gentlemen, who had mentioned it the next day as proof of the

entertaining powers of young McCutcheon, no less than their own thoughtlessness. They were away from the city on the night that the detective picked up the fact, but he had it from a person, thoroughly trustworthy, who heard their words.

“Fate is very kind to McCutcheon and Gibbons in this *alibi* business,” reflected Detective Blowitz, as he made his way homeward, at a leisurely gait, late in the evening; “I hope it will be equally kind to Melton. If it is, then I shall have to get in some fine work on McFarlane. I wonder whether the gentleman has ever taken any lessons in the art of sleight of hand,” he added abruptly. “That is quite a fad in his set, and he may have become an expert. But there is something absurd in the idea that a young man possessing as much wealth as he does would descend to theft. Kleptomaniacs, however, is a disease which never afflicts poor people; with them it is stealing.

“Then, too,” continued the detective, following the line of musing on which he was started, “he must have had a confederate to learn, in the first place, the call-signal, and, in the next place, to use it. It is inconceivable that he would have burglariously entered the store, and Gumbridge says that yesterday was the first time he ever saw him come into his place. For a man holding his situation in society, he would be a fool to give any one such a hold upon him.

“No, there isn’t one chance in a thousand that he had anything to do with it. It will be waste of time to pipe him, though I’ll set Zimcoe on his track for a while. Then, suppose I get word from Ocean Beach that Melton hasn’t left there since he visited it on his vacation, whom shall I suspect? I’m blessed if I know,” he added, removing his hat and mopping his forehead. “I wonder whether Gumbridge or any of his clerks have ever given away the combination of his safe. It doesn’t seem likely, but one of them may have dropped it without suspecting the fact. It’s a confoundedly hazy affair any way you look at it. I hope there is some word from Archer.”

He ascended his own steps a few minutes later, and let himself in with his night key. The lamp burned low in the hall, and, reaching up, he turned it on full head. As he did so, and before removing his hat, he glanced at the rack where his letters and messages were always placed by his servant at night. There lay the cheap yellow envelope of the Western Union, with his address on it. It was with more agitation than he had felt in along time, that he broke it open, and by the gas-light overhead read the following sentence:—

“Melton spent last night in New York.

ARCHER.”

CHAPTER VII.

JOSIAH ARCHER had taken up the business of detective less than two years before he assumed a *rôle* that was destined to be the most memorable in his life, in tracing the black diamond so unaccountably abstracted from the safe of the jewelers and diamond brokers, Messrs. Shipman & Gumbridge. Believing that he had now entered upon a case where he had the chance to make his mark, he threw his whole energy into the task. Hitherto he had not had anything of much importance, and he accepted the work given to him by Mr. Blowitz as a proof of confidence which he meant should be raised far above par.

The work, as has been intimated before, was so simple that the veriest tyro would have found no trouble in doing it, that is, so far as learning the simple fact as to whether or not Melton was in New York on the preceding evening; but beyond that he saw looming up possibilities of achievement such as would make the older members of the force turn pale with envy. If it should be proven that the young man had made the visit to the metropolis, then Archer would set to work to trace the diamond. It was unfeeling, but in his

heart he never wished for anything more ardently than he did that such a visit had been made by the young man who was all unsuspecting of the Nemesis that was descending upon him as fast as steam could carry him.

It was between seven and eight o'clock that evening that Archer's train drew up at the long platform of Ocean Beach (now called Belmar), and he stepped down and made his way to one of the several hacks in waiting. The inquiries which he had made on the way led him to take the stage that set him down at the well-known Columbia House, which stands very near the ocean. The first thing, after handing his bag over to one of the colored boys in waiting, was to register and go to his room to prepare for dinner. There was no objection, that he saw, to using his own name, and he wrote in a good round hand:—

“Josiah Archer, New York City.”

Then he ran his eye rapidly over the register for several pages, and just a week and a day back, he came upon the name:—

➤ “Edmund Melton, New York City.”

There was the game for which he was hunting.

Then, as he stepped aside to make room for another gentleman waiting to register, he asked in a low voice of the clerk,—

“Is Mr. Melton with you yet?”

"I am not sure. He went to New York yesterday, and I don't know whether he has returned or not."

"Yes, he has," said a guest, standing near; "he got back this morning and was in bathing. I think he is down at the pavilion."

"Never mind," remarked the detective; "I will meet him later: there is no hurry about it."

When Archer ascended the stairs he went up two steps at a time. He felt as light as air. He was sure he was on the trail of the criminal, and would have him juggled before long. He had impressed the number of Melton's room on his mind, and found that it was at the rear, opening on the upper piazza, which extends along the avenue. His means would not permit him to take one facing the ocean. Archer was in such high spirits that he could hardly keep from breaking out in song. He did hum softly, and began to hail the grand success that he saw within his reach. He would achieve glory and distinction at a bound. At a single leap he would land in a niche above that which it had taken Blowitz more than ten years to attain. He would—but hold; it would never do to give rein to his fancy in this style!

After dinner, Archer lit a cigar and sauntered toward the pavilion, as it is known at Ocean Beach. The threatened storm having cleared, or, more properly, having spent itself over the metropolis, and the night

being close and sultry, that resort was crowded with visitors. Parties were promenading back and forth over the board walk, while the beach was dotted here and there with couples lolling on the sand in loving attitudes, and talking of the thousand airy nothings that suggest themselves at such times. And the old Atlantic was as majestic, as overpowering in its grandeur as ever. The breakers, their crescents crowned with foam, sparkling with phosphorescence, tumbled and broke against the shore, sliding far up the smooth beach, in their quest for those that were lounging too near, and eager as ever to clasp the confiding in their merciless grasp, and strangle all life out of them.

It was quite dark, but the full moon was due between nine and ten o'clock, and scores were scattered along the beach to witness the sight, which is always impressively beautiful. Some, forgetful that other eyes were sharp, despite the gloom, were so affectionate in their actions as to excite smiles, and occasionally crisp comments, which recalled with comical suddenness the forgetful ones to themselves.

The detective extended his walk to the pavilion, where, seating himself under the covered platform, lit by the several lamps, he prepared to use his eyes and ears for all they were worth.

He had no description of young Melton, and, so far as he knew, had never seen him; but that did not pre-

vent him from inquiring for him as though he were an old acquaintance. There were several who knew the gentleman; but it was evident that he was not on the pavilion. A boy said he was there only a few minutes before, and was probably on the beach near by. Lighting another cigar, Archer began plodding through the sand, just beyond reach of the incoming waves, looking keenly at the groups as he approached and passed them.

About half-way between the pavilion and the Columbia he suspected he saw his man. He was attired, so far as he could discern, in a light summer suit, his hat lying beside him, while he supported his body in a lazy attitude on one elbow, employing the other hand in scooping out a hollow in the sand, after the manner of little children, who find enjoyment in that sort of thing for hours at a time.

“I beg your pardon,” said the detective politely, “but have you seen Mr. Melton this evening?”

The gentleman addressed came to a sitting posture, and, with his knees drawn up and clasped by his arms, replied: “My name is Melton.”

“Ah, this is jolly; how are you, Bob?”

Archer bent forward and peered at his face in the gloom, with his hand extended, as he seated himself beside him. The young man accepted the hand, but said with a pleasant laugh, —

“You have made a mistake; my name is Edmund Melton.”

“Well, now, that’s funny; I took you for my old classmate at Princeton, Bob Melton. He told me he was going to spend a part of the summer on the Jersey shore; and, when I found there was a Mr. Melton stopping at the Columbia, I jumped to the conclusion that it was he. I beg your pardon, I am sure.”

Archer made no move to leave, and Melton promptly answered, —

“That is all-right; there are a good many people in this world whose names and looks are similar, and the wonder is that there are not more mistakes made. Are you staying at the Columbia?”

“Yes; I arrived on the last Central train.”

“I suppose you will remain several weeks?”

The detective was glad to be questioned in this off-hand style by his new acquaintance, for it gave him an excuse to do something himself in the same line.

“I would like to do so,” he replied, “but I can hardly afford the time. Business you know is business.”

“Yes, I have learned that; I have been here a little more than a week, and it doesn’t seem half that long. I must be at work in New York within the coming week, so as to give the other boys a turn. It seems to me,” added Melton with boyish frankness, “that I never could get enough of a vacation like this; and yet I suppose it would become irksome after a while. The

only way to enjoy anything of this kind is to stint yourself. I often think of what the old hunter said to General Washington."

"What was that?"

"'Gin'ral,' said he, 'if you want a ^{real} ~~ra'al~~ good night's sleep, set up for two nights and you'll be sure to get it.' There's a good deal more philosophy in that, according to my thinking, than appears at first. The rich are to be envied, and yet they don't get half the fun and enjoyment out of life that the poor and healthy do."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE detective was getting along famously. Edmund Melton possessed one of those magnetic, boyish natures which attract and win all with whom they come in contact. Archer could see his face and profile clearly enough to know that he was remarkably good looking; and he did not need to be told that he was popular among his associates.

He offered the youth a cigar, which he declined with thanks, and rattled on in his aimless fashion:—

“I have really lost one day out of my vacation,” he remarked, after the talk had run on for a considerable while.

“Ah, how was that? Not sick, I hope.”

“Gracious, no! I never remember being sick an hour in my life; but I had to go to New York yesterday, and the place looked anything but inviting under the August sun.”

“You hurried back, of course, so as to spend the night here?”

Melton hesitated a moment, as though, for the first time in their conversation, a theme had been touched upon which he could not speak freely. Archer noticed it; but the reply came the next moment,—

"No, I had to stay all night; but I was back this morning on the first train, and I hope I won't have to go again until my vacation is over. Even then I wouldn't object to a message from Mr. Gumbridge, that I might stay another week."

He laughed in his merry fashion, and turned his frank face toward the gentleman at his side, as if inviting his views on the important subject.

"Gumbridge, Gumbridge," repeated the detective; "he is in the dry-goods line, isn't he?"

"No; haven't you heard of the diamond and jewelry establishment of Shipman & Gumbridge, Maiden Lane?"

"Yes; but it is out of my line."

"May I ask what is that?"

"Life insurance, and I don't fancy it; for it is a business in which one must make a confounded nuisance of himself or fail utterly; even that doesn't avail him half the time."

"My business is quite different," said Melton; "I devote myself to jewelry and diamonds; but we have the best employers in the world. The senior is away now, but a father couldn't be kinder than Mr. Gumbridge."

"Did you see him yesterday?"

"No; I didn't reach the city till after business hours, and I came away too early this morning to call—ah! look there!"

A chorus of exclamations of "There it is!" went up from the parties along the beach and on the walk, and all eyes were turned toward the horizon over the ocean, where the fiery upper edge of the full moon had just shown itself. It rose rapidly and looked prodigiously large, as it came more into view, the great flaming ball, gleaming across the dark waters, and sending a stream of light to the shore, whose expansion and contraction always seem the reverse of what they should be.

But those who had viewed with delighted admiration the same scene were now favored with an unexpected and uniquely beautiful sight, which a man is fortunate who beholds once in his life. Every one was hushed, and nothing but the dull boom of the breakers struck the ear, when a universal series of "oh's" and "ah's" came to the lips of the beholders.

The moon had just climbed above the horizon, the lowermost point of the rim appearing yet to touch the water, when a ship under full sail glided in front of it. Masts, rigging, and hull were as sharply defined as if impressed in ink against the glowing orb. The entrancing picture could last but a moment. The ship, which came out of the darkness into the flood of splendor, sailed into the gloom again, toward her port, which may have been on the other side of the world, all unconscious of the wonderful treat she had given to the multitude along shore. And the moon climbed

higher and higher, seeming to slacken its speed and shrink in its dimensions as it ascended farther and farther above the horizon.

“That sight is worth coming a thousand miles to see !” exclaimed the detective with enthusiasm.

“Truly it is ; I have often heard of it, and a number have told me they had seen it, but this is the first time it was ever my good fortune.”

“How glad I am that I’m here to-night. I have something now to tell my patrons when I am boring them for their applications.”

From the direction of the hotel came strains of music mingling with the deep bass of the ocean. Most of the promenaders began moving thither, and Melton proposed to his new acquaintance that they should do the same. He willingly agreed ; and, rising to their feet, they plodded through the yielding sand to the plank-walk, along which they strolled until they ascended the steps of the Columbia, and passed through toward the dancing-room, where several scores were tripping over the smooth floor to the music of a colored orchestra of five performers.

Archer was anxious to obtain a good view of young Melton, and as they came into the glare of light he did so. The view could not have been more pleasing. He was the picture of athletic grace and beauty, as shown in a youth just developing into manhood. He wore a

white flannel suit, canvas shoes, and carried a jaunty straw hat in his hand. His hair was black and cut short, and the faint warnings of a coming mustache appeared on his finely turned upper lip. The face was a pure oval, with regular features, dark, merry eyes, and a perfect set of white teeth, which showed when he smiled.

Add to this the fact that Melton was one of those rare youths, who, possessing all these attractions, yet seemed unconscious of them, and little more can be said in commendation of his appearance and manner. It was not strange that the moment he came forward, he was warmly greeted by ladies and gentlemen. He stood with a number of others at the door, watching the inspiring scene, Archer being one of the group.

Within five minutes, a half-dozen bright young ladies were gathered round him, laughing, chattering, and jesting, and wanting to know why he had not appeared before and taken part in the dance. Melton replied that his costume was hardly the proper one for the ball-room; but they reminded him that this was one of the "off nights," and directed his attention to the fact that there were hardly half a dozen in evening dress. He had to confess that he was cornered, and, flinging his hat into one of the chairs at the side of the room, called to Archer, asking him to excuse him, and the next moment was whirling about the room with the

prettiest girl of all, the consensus of opinion being that they were the finest-looking couple and the best dancers there.

"There is no use for me here," concluded the detective, walking back to the front room, where he sat down at the table and busied himself with writing quite a lengthy letter.

It was addressed to Erastus Blowitz, and was what might be called his report, for it summarized his experience after his arrival at Ocean Beach that evening.

"I have spent more than an hour in Edmund Melton's company," wrote Archer, "and find him one of the most agreeable youths I ever met. He is handsome, athletic, and well-liked by everybody. He possesses a fine education, and seems frank and outspoken; but, for all that, I have observed something deep in his nature which a superficial acquaintance would not notice.

"In our conversation, he told me that he went to New York yesterday on a late afternoon train. When I remarked off-hand that, of course, he hurried back, so as to spend the night at this delightful resort, he hesitated. Finally he said he stayed in the city, but left on an early train this morning.

"The hesitation and his peculiarity of manner were significant. In the brief space between my question and his answer he must have done a good deal of

thinking. No doubt he meant at first to say that he was here last night, but saw that such an untruth could be easily detected. So he admitted the important fact, trusting to other means of proving an *alibi*, if necessary.

“I have no doubt in my own mind that it was he who took the black diamond, though whether or not he has it with him is a question that remains to be answered. I beg you to leave me alone here to work the case to its end. If I need help, I will telegraph you. Of course I shall keep you informed of everything, and rely on your superior judgment when the time comes to act. I think it is safe to promise that you may rest content in the certainty that we are on the right trail and will soon bag the game.”

“Bag the game !” Little did Josiah Archer suspect the pain those words caused Detective Blowitz when he read them on the following day.

CHAPTER IX.

DETECTIVE ARCHER was just finishing this important letter, when he became conscious that some one was standing at his elbow. He turned, and could not avoid a start when he recognized Edmund Melton.

“Pardon me, Mr. Archer, but they took me fairly off my feet; won’t you join us in a dance?”

“Thanks; I hardly think I will do so this evening. It is quite late, and I have some letters to write.”

In the background Archer saw several ladies, evidently watching the result of the request.

“We would be pleased to have you,” said the youth; “but of course business must be attended to,” and he hurried off to join the ladies, whom he had doubtless been telling about his new friend.

Josiah Archer folded and sealed his envelope, taking care that no one should catch sight of the superscription. Dropping it in the letter-box, he lit a cigar and strolled out upon the front piazza, where he seated himself in a rocking-chair and elevated his feet upon the railing.

“I wonder whether he saw anything I wrote? Was that invitation only an excuse for him to glance over

my shoulder? Did he suspect anything when he saw me writing? It won't do to tell Blowitz this episode, for he would say I ought to know better than to give any person a chance to steal a word from a letter. It makes me uncomfortable, and confirms me more than ever in my suspicion. That young Melton is a sly one."

The following day brought one of those inspiring scenes and experiences which do so much to render a person's sojourn at the seaside healthful, invigorating, and delightful. Bathing hours were from half-past ten until one, and fully a hundred bathers were disporting themselves in the breakers off the pavilion. Between eleven and noon were what might be called the golden hours, and the fun was at its height. The bathing-master, in scant suit, with legs bare to the knees, and with a dilapidated straw hat, sat in the sand, keeping ward and watch over the revelers, some of whom, in the wantonness of enjoyment, were venturing beyond the danger stakes. He knew most of them as excellent swimmers; but he knew, too, that most frequently from those very ones come those who drown, since they presume too far upon their skill.

There were laughing girls, who could not be persuaded to venture beyond the edge of the water. There they stood, and shrieked when the waves tumbled them about like corks, unable to believe that they

had only to go a little farther out to lessen the roughness to which they were subjected. There were others again who, in their pretty suits, plunged boldly in, dove under the incoming wave, and swam out like the mermaids to where the ocean was comparatively still. One of them climbed upon the stake to which the end of a safety line was fastened. Then, after crouching like a pretty bird for a minute, she went off head-first, coming up twenty feet away, laughing and dashing water in the face of her escort, who couldn't swim half so well as she.

And there were bulky dowagers too, who looked so funny in their suits that one could not help laughing. And the elderly gentlemen, too, were there. They were among the most timid, and ducked and puffed and blowed and convinced themselves that they were enjoying it immensely, unsuspecting that the spectators under their sunshades were getting a world of amusement out of the exhibition.

By and by two swimmers began to attract attention. They had gone far out beyond the ropes, and acted as though they intended to make a trip to Great Britain. They had the advantage of water which was smooth, except for the long, heaving swell which increased in height as it approached shallow water, and broke into foam and spray as it played havoc with the bathers nearer shore.

“That young Melton is the best swimmer I ever saw,” remarked the bathing-master to a friend at his side; “but he will catch it one of these days. Suppose he gets a cramp?”

“He would turn over on his back and float till he regained the use of his limbs.”

“Maybe so and maybe not; when a fellow feels the twinge in one leg and has it run all through him the next second, he loses his head, begins to struggle, and then it is all over with him. Do you know who that man is with him?”

“No; he came last night. My! he’s a swimmer too.”

“They are both foolish; they’re in water fifty feet deep, and how could help get to them if they should need it?”

“They take the risk in spite of all the warnings, and they must take the consequences too.”

“That’s all well enough, but I don’t want any drowning cases here this summer; we haven’t had any yet, and I wouldn’t get over it in a year. That was a close call last Sunday.”

“What was that?”

“A young man from the Brunswick came down here after eating a big dinner and filling up on wine. Then, what did the fellow do but go up the beach yonder, and plunge in where the waves are the worst! At the first clip over he went. Nobody thought anything was

wrong, when they saw him rolling about in the surf; but when he didn't get up and was being carried out to sea, everybody shouted that he was drowning. We got to him just in time to save him. Ugh! I haven't got over it yet."

"Why, a man swam down from Ocean Grove the other day, and after resting a while swam back again. What do you think of that?"

"He was a professional and was one of ten thousand. I could do it, but a thousand dollars wouldn't tempt me to try."

"By George! they're having such fun that I can't stand it!" exclaimed the friend of the bathing-master. "I must take a dip."

And dashing up the beach, he soon emerged, clad in a bathing-suit, and ran out into the surf. He was one of the sensible ones, and, although a fair swimmer, did not go beyond the ropes. He found plenty of enjoyment there, frolicking with the others and tumbling about, and turning heels over head without any risk to himself.

The identity of the two bathers, who were the cause of the remarks just quoted, has already been suspected by the reader. The name of one has been given. The other was Josiah Archer, the detective, who prided himself on being one of the finest swimmers anywhere. When he met Melton in the morning, the latter invited

him to join him in a swim, and he eagerly did so. He said nothing about his skill, but resolved to give the athletic young man a test he had never known before.

"If he beats me swimming, he has got to work hard—he will find that out," he muttered, as he came down the inclined beach to the water.

It took but a few minutes for him to discover that Melton was a master of the natatorial art. He dove and disported himself like a porpoise, swimming far below the surface, turning somersaults, shooting forward on his back and then on his side, and reveling in the very wantonness of health, strength, and skill. But Archer gave an exhibition too which compelled the commendation of his companion.

"There's no need of your taking lessons," he remarked; "I shouldn't be surprised if you had been in the water before."

"I have once or twice; let's take a swim out to sea?"

"I am agreeable; come on."

And they did so, making their way fully a half-mile from shore. Melton, determined not to be the first to give up, would have kept on, but Archer, who had started with the same resolve, began to think they were risking too much, and proposed that they return.

"Very well; you are not tired?"

"Not a bit, but what's the use? We might have an accident."

“We’ll take it easy,” remarked Melton, swimming with the long, powerful, and yet deliberate stroke of the consummate swimmer.

He was a little in advance of his companion, whom he could see only by turning his head. Half the distance was passed, when a gurgling sound and a strange cry caused him to look over his shoulder. To his dismay, Archer was nowhere in sight. At the same moment he saw people running about in great excitement on the beach and caught the cry: —

“A man is drowning! A man is drowning!”

CHAPTER X.

SEVERAL minutes having passed since Melton had looked round at his companion, it was impossible to tell where he had gone down; but he knew it was not far behind him, and a little to the left. He turned at once and swam in that direction, glancing sharply on every hand for the drowning man to rise. A gurgling noise to one side accompanied the reappearance of the head and face of the poor fellow, who was struggling in that frantic, aimless fashion which people show when panic-stricken, and which only hastens death. His countenance was distorted with agony, and it was evident he was wrenched through by that fearful scourge of swimmers, — the cramp.

Melton shot toward him like a flash, and caught his hair as he was going down again, still struggling.

“Keep cool, Archer! keep cool!” he shouted; “stop trying to swim, and I’ll take care of you.”

Had this course been followed at the moment the unfortunate man was first seized it might have availed, but he was no longer responsible for what he did. The instant Melton caught him he threw both arms about his rescuer’s neck. Melton knew the frightful danger,

and fought like a tiger to free himself, but all his strength could not unloose the fatal grip. The drowning man went down again, and this time he took his friend with him. But the youth kept his head, even in that awful moment. He directed his movements toward reaching the surface, and he succeeded sooner than he expected. He had managed to get the arms of Archer from his neck while below; but the fellow seized his left wrist with a grip like a vise, and it could not be twisted loose. *Title Page Picture*

At the moment of reaching air the two were facing each other. Melton called to him again to keep cool and remain passive, but it was useless; he began fighting desperately to seize his preserver in his embrace, and would have done so, but for the last resort of the swimmer when caught in such peril. Quickly drawing back his clinched fist, Melton let drive straight between the eyes. The blow was delivered with all his strength, and did the business. Archer was stunned, and instantly became as limp as a rag.

Freeing the imprisoned wrist, Melton fastened his hand in his hair, and holding the head above the water, began slowly swimming with his right arm and lower limbs toward shore. A long distance was before him, and the task was hard. He kept an eye upon his charge, ready, in case he renewed his struggles, to strike him again. The fellow partly opened his eyes

once or twice, and there was some twitching about the face, but he remained passive.

By this time Melton gained a chance to note things on shore. The excitement was at its height, and the bathing-master was furiously rowing in his boat toward them. The youth, therefore, did not waste his strength in trying to get forward fast; but it was as easy for him to progress slowly as to remain stationary, and he moved gradually toward the boat, which a few minutes later was at his side.

"He's all right," remarked the youth, as dropping his oars the master leaned over and grasped the arm of the unconscious man; "hold him till I get in the boat to help you."

Grasping the gunwale, Melton climbed in without help, and then seizing the other arm of the half-senseless Archer, the sufferer was lifted over the side and placed carefully in the bottom of the boat. He was not so far gone as to need the usual measures for resuscitation. He looked about him in a bewildered way; but when offered the whisky flask of the bathing-master he swallowed a deep draught, and became himself before the craft began fighting its way through the breakers, where the willing hands of other bathers almost carried it ashore.

Mr. Josiah Archer experienced severe emotions. He was humiliated to find himself the "cynosure of all

eyes," as he was helped up the beach to the bath-house, and to reflect that, in trying to show off his skill in swimming, he had made an altogether bigger "show" than he intended.

Among the swarm on the beach was a medical gentleman, who, after an examination of the detective, pronounced him all right. He had ridden himself of the surplus water in the treasury of his stomach, and by the time he was dressed was able to walk back to the hotel without aid.

Melton remained with him as long as there was the least likelihood of need, and was at his side when he returned to the Columbia. Mr. Archer was profuse in his thanks, for there could be no question that but for the help of the youth his life would have been lost. Edmund made light of his services.

"It might just as well have been the other way," he said, "though I have never had the cramp."

"Nor I either before to-day, but it came on me like a house afire. At first it felt as if a red-hot needle were thrust into my right leg below the knee. Like a flash it went all through that leg, which drew up against my body, and was paralyzed."

"Why didn't you call to me?"

"Partly because of a foolish pride, but more because I believed I could take care of myself. I made a move to turn on my back, so as to float, when the pain darted

through my left leg. Then I lost my head, and before I could make a respectable sound, down I went. After that everything was mixed, and a total blank followed that clip you gave me between the eyes."

"I struck as hard as I knew how," said Edmund with a laugh.

"It was the only thing to do; you must have been through such scenes before?"

"I have, once or twice, but I never hit a fellow before except poor Wash Fulmer at Coney Island; but I hope you don't feel any ill-effects from the blow."

"The only effect is that I am a living and breathing man at this moment."

It was singular that in making his fervent response to the question, Archer did not forget his detective instincts. He noticed that when Melton mentioned the name of Wash Fulmer he checked himself, as though it was a slip of the tongue, and instantly changed the drift of his words. That of itself might have meant nothing, but for the fact that he happened to know that the individual referred to was a fugitive from justice at that moment, and one for whose detection a large reward was set. He was about the age of Melton, but was accused of a crime grave enough to send him to Sing Sing for a long term.

The thought that flashed through the brain of the officer was that this same Fulmer was involved in some

way in the disappearance of the black diamond. (Melton's manner confirmed the thought. But it need not be said that nothing in the action of the detective raised a suspicion that he was thinking of anything except his own narrow escape from drowning.

Upon reaching the hotel he found himself such a general subject of interest, that he was glad to climb to his room and escape the looks and inquiries, even though they were tempered with sympathy.

"I feel like an overgrown calf," he growled, when he reached his room, "and I ought to have a saucer of milk placed before me. Well, I have been a calf and a lubber, and if it wasn't for my business here, I'd take the first train to New York. The papers will get hold of it, and I wonder what Blowitz will say to-morrow when he reads the account. He will think it necessary to send some one down here to take care of me. Confound it! I haven't any time to lose. I must get to work right away. I wish it had been somebody else than Melton that pulled me out of the water; for it does look rather mean to turn on your rescuer, and be the means of putting him in limbo; but business is business."

No doubt there are many who, if placed in the situation of Josiah Archer, would have withdrawn from the case rather than push his rescuer on to ruin. Duty might have urged them to go ahead, but gratitude would have prevented.

“Cæsar, but he can hit a blow!” added the detective, as a ringing pain shot through his head; “he knocked me out in one round, or rather knocked me in, for where would I have been but for that same lifter between the eyes?”

“But, Josiah Archer,” he added, rousing up, “this sentimentality won’t do. At this rate you’ll fail ever to ‘get there.’ There’s a big job for you; you have a reputation to make, and must be up and doing.”

CHAPTER XI.

DETECTIVE BLOWITZ was anything but a happy man after reading the telegram from his assistant at Ocean Beach. Although he half expected it, it annoyed him so that after ascending to his room he sat until after midnight smoking and thinking. Then, with a sigh, he went to bed and tossed about until near daybreak before closing his eyes.

“It has narrowed down to McFarlane and this young fellow in Jersey,” he said the next morning as he sat at the table alone, for the famous detective was a widower without children, “and I shall know before noon whether McFarlane is in it — Helloa!”

His eye had caught the item in the paper that lay on the table at his side, — for reading and eating went together with him, — which told of the rescue of Mr. Josiah Archer by Edmund Melton.

“Confound it!” muttered the detective; “it’s getting worse and worse. Archer ought to turn about and give him a tip of what’s on foot and help him off; I believe I would if in his place.”

These were very unprofessional sentiments, but it must be remembered that Detective Blowitz was more

human than some that make their living by the same means. He held such strong admiration for that boy that he would have gone to any lengths to serve him, and here he found himself impelled by a resistless fate to gather the net that was to disgrace and ruin him forever. He felt no further interest in the news, but ate slowly and thoughtfully. His active brain was full of schemes, the ultimate object of which was the saving of the lad who stood in such awful peril. The most feasible one, at first thought, was to go to Mr. Gumbridge, state the fact, get him to help in suppressing further knowledge of the theft, and to join in saving his clerk. No doubt when Melton realized the enormity of his crime, and was offered forgiveness on condition of restoring the diamond, he would be eager to do so.

“It would be the turning-point in his life; it will any way,” added the detective gravely, “whichever way it ends.”

The fatal objection to the plan, as he well knew, was that Mr. Gumbridge would not be a partner to it. He had no patience with any form of dishonesty, and would never consent to compound a crime. He judged from what he had heard of the boy's guardian, Colonel Bainbridge, that he was equally stern in his views. The next scheme was to go to Ocean Beach in disguise so that Archer would not know him, seek out Melton, tell him that the crime was certain to be proved against

him, get him to restore the diamond, and then persuade him to leave for the West.

“If he needs funds I’ll let him have them,” muttered the officer, banging his fork on the table.

This was more unprofessional even than the thought expressed a few minutes before, for it involved action on his part. Profound as was his sympathy for the boy, however, the plan failed to please himself; and by the time he had finished his morning meal and had lit his cigar, it was dismissed altogether. His next attempt was to formulate some plot by which the diamond could be recovered, and yet have Melton appear innocent.

“If I could get him to let me have it I might contrive to drop it in the safe when no one was looking, or I could slip it into Gumbridge’s pocket, where he would find it himself.”

But reflection convinced him that this would not do. The gentleman would never believe that the gem could have disappeared in that style; and the midnight visitation to the store and the opening of the safe must still remain unexplained. Then, too, if it was dropped in the coat-pocket of the jeweler, more than likely he would lose it before finding it.

Now, the discouraging feature of Detective Blowitz’s musing and scheming was that it was based on the theory that Edmund Melton was guilty. While he could not help believing so, he was not without hope that

something, impossible as yet to imagine, might turn up to prove his innocence. He had forgotten a step that he ought to have taken before, and which was the first thing he now did after leaving his home. He went to the nearest telegraph-office, and sent a message to a brother professional in Philadelphia, asking him to ascertain of a certainty whether R. Field McFarlane, who claimed to have been at the Continental Hotel two nights before, had actually stayed there. He knew the individual to whom it was sent as one of the best officers in the service, who would not accept the mere presence of a man's name on the register of a hotel as proof that he was there or made it himself. McFarlane might have gone thither, and returned on a late train, or some one may have written it for him; it was necessary to know of his actual presence there up to midnight at least.

Detective Blowitz returned to his house to wait for news, as all telegrams from Archer, or his Philadelphia friend, were to be directed to his residence, besides which he was expecting a letter from his assistant at the seashore. The letter reached him about noon, and the reader knows its purport. It did not specially interest the detective, and he waited impatiently for the response from the neighboring city. That would be of momentous significance. It came sooner than he anticipated, for it happened that Blowitz's telegram was promptly

received by the very man of all others able to give him the information. Thus it read: —

“I was with McFarlane at a friend’s on Walnut Street till after eleven; went to the Continental with him; he retired at twelve; no mistake about this.”

Detective Blowitz held the dispatch in his hand for several minutes, reading over the lines, and even looking on the back, as though he hoped to find some contradiction there. But, alas! there was none; and he sighed, and muttered his favorite exclamation, “Confound it!”

Still clinging to a hope so slender that he would have reproved a brother professional for entertaining it, he lay back in his chair, puffed his cigar, and conjured up a myriad of things. The question that he turned over in his mind was whether McFarlane after all could be the guilty person, even though ninety miles away from the actual crime at the time of its commission.

“He may have had a trusted confederate, to whom he gave the signal and combination, and left him to do the job, while he reaped the biggest part of the reward. Then, too — but confound it! how could he have obtained the combination to the safe?”

He reflected that the call-signal might have been picked up in the manner suggested elsewhere, but it was impossible that the open “sesame” should have been acquired in that manner.

"There are five persons who know the combination," he continued, following the thread of his gloomy thoughts, — "Mr. Shipman, at present in Europe, Mr. Gumbridge, and the three clerks, Gibbons, McCutcheon, and Melton. No one of them could have given the combination to any other person unless with a guilty purpose. It all comes back to the conclusion from which there is no escaping; young Melton is the criminal, and if so he ought to suffer."

The officer uttered the last words savagely, as he was pacing up and down the room, and looked around with such a fierce expression of countenance that the servant, who was on the point of entering just then, shrank back and decided to await a more opportune season before disturbing her master. Suddenly he caught up his paper and read again the account of Archer's narrow escape from death while bathing.

"No," he added, resuming his walk more thoughtfully; "he wasn't drowned, so there's no hope there."

He was trying to rouse himself to a feeling of resentment against the youthful culprit, but could not do so. The chords of sympathy for the orphan boy, with his stern guardian, and his own bright, sunny nature, were stirred in spite of himself.

"He may be guilty, but I won't believe it till it is proven or he confesses. If it isn't proven, and he persists in denying it, confound me! if I don't devote the

rest of my natural born days to establishing his innocence — Helloa ! I wonder what's that !”

It was the ring at his door bell which caused him to stop short in his promenade and look inquiringly at the servant who answered the call. She quickly reappeared, and handed him another yellow envelope with the Western Union mark on it. It was in cipher, which he read as easily as plain English : —

“ Will be up in the morning ; I recovered the black diamond this afternoon. ARCHER.”

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Detective Blowitz read this telegram from his assistant, he steeled his heart against the tenderness that had been creeping into it for the past twenty-four hours. He felt that the crime having been proven against the youth the time for mercy was past; and though he could not but regret the turn the affair had taken, justice must be done.

He sent a dispatch to Archer, asking him to be at Mr. Gumbridge's room at the Astor House on the morrow, as near ten o'clock as possible. Then, boarding a car, he rode down to the hotel to look for the gentleman himself. He was out, and had left no word when he would be back, so the officer had to content himself in the meanwhile as best he could. He had a note placed in the broker's box, saying that he wished to see him on important business, and would return at eight o'clock.

He went out because he had to keep moving. He walked a long distance, and despite the sultriness of the night did so at a rapid pace, reappearing at the hotel before the hour named by himself. He was told that Mr. Gumbridge was in his room, and would be glad to

see him there. Ten minutes later the whole story was told to the employer of Edmund Melton. The gentleman looked grave, but there was no faltering on his part.

"I am and I am not surprised," he said, when the recital was finished; "the turn of events pointed irresistibly to Edmund, but I would as soon have suspected myself of the crime. Regrets, however, are useless."

"What about his guardian?"

"Colonel Bainbridge? I believe he is in the country."

"I mean to ask what do you think his course will be when he learns the truth?"

"There can be no doubt as to that," returned Mr. Gumbridge with a mirthless smile; "he will cast him off, and be the most ardent in pressing his punishment."

"The unfeeling scoundrel!" exclaimed Detective Blowitz, "to turn against his own blood and kin in that fashion."

("You have read of the Roman general who killed his own son for disobeying his orders, even though it saved his army.")

"Yes, I have read about those old fools, who are held up as models to this benighted nineteenth century. I want to hear no more of them. Archer has ruined a young man that saved his life, but," said the detective

with a sigh, "I don't suppose I ought to talk in this strain. I will be here to-morrow at ten, if that suits you, to hear Archer's report."

"I will leave Gibbons to attend to the store, and will meet you," said the broker, as he shook the hand of his friend and bade him good-night.

Detective Blowitz was in that desperate mood that he lost to some extent his usual calmness and mental poise.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, wheeling about and starting for Courtlandt Street. "I'll go down to Ocean Beach to-night and find out whether there isn't some way of fixing this so as to save that boy. I think a good plan will be to take Archer down to the ocean and drown him, and then insist that I dreamed I received his message."

When he reached the railway-office, however, he learned there were no more trains that night; and inasmuch as a little inquiry developed that he could not reach the seaside in time to intercept his assistant, he gave it up, and walked all the way to his home in Thirty-fourth Street.

The detective was at the Astor House the following morning, according to appointment, and the two gentlemen were smoking and trying hard to assume a cheerfulness which neither felt. Both had passed a bad night; for despite the cold, relentless principles of the

diamond broker, he could not quench a deep sympathy and tender regard for the handsome, manly lad, whom he would have been proud to own as a son, that had now taken a fatal step from which there was no recoil.

And though Erastus Blowitz, who never had been a father, might steel his heart against everything except justice toward the splendid youth, he could not shut out a sadness that at times made him loathe the profession that had been the means of dragging the boy into an abyss from which he could and ought to have been rescued.

Promptly on time there was a gentle tap at the door, and Josiah Archer entered, smiling, and with hat in hand. When Detective Blowitz looked on his glowing face and noted the look of triumph, he could hardly repress his disgust.

"He is happy because he has done a good job, and doesn't think of the noble boy who saved his life, and who, if rightly handled, could have been rescued from a fate a thousand-fold worse than death. I suppose that if Archer had been drowned day before yesterday I would be called upon to mourn him, but I'm blessed if my tears wouldn't have been crocodile ones."

The young detective shook hands with the two gentlemen, and then backed to a chair, and sat down. He was nervous from exultation, and strove hard to repress the emotion that prompted him to swing his

hat above his head and cheer himself for what he had done.

"It was rather curious," said Mr. Gumbridge after the usual preliminaries, "that Edmund should have been the one to save you from drowning."

"Yes, so it was, so it was," replied Archer briskly; "I would it had been different."

"So do I," interrupted Detective Blowitz dryly.

"What do you mean?" demanded the young man, turning sharply on his superior.

"I am simply agreeing with you — that's all," was the sarcastic reply; "but go on and tell us about this brilliant exploit of yours."

Blowitz, within the five minutes succeeding the entrance of his assistant, had decided upon a heroic course; he would insist that, the diamond having been recovered, no one besides the three and the lad himself should ever know the truth, and everything possible should be done to save Melton.

But most unexpectedly the last resort was saved him.

"Well," replied Archer, still trying to repress his buoyancy of spirits to something befitting the sorrowful circumstances, "there isn't a great deal to tell. My sousing yesterday forenoon knocked me up pretty well, and made me such an object of interest that I stayed within the hotel the rest of the day, so as to keep away

from the inquiries that greeted me everywhere. I sat on the upper piazza alone, in a rocking-chair, smoking, and thinking hard over this case" —

"With a tiny thought now and then, I suppose, of the young man who pulled you out of the water?" suggested Blowitz.

"Of course," assented Archer, with a doubting glance at his master; "but I remembered that you told me the cardinal rule of the detective's life is that he should have no heart, and that business must supersede all other considerations."

"So I did — so I did; for I always have been a fool, especially when I conceived there was any need of saying that to *you*; but go on, go on — this is a most interesting story."

"It happened that where I was sitting was directly in front of young Melton's room, which opens on the piazza. You know in the summer season nearly every door and window are open in a seaside hotel. So it was the easiest thing in the world for me to step through the window, open his trunk with skeleton keys, and make a quick and thorough search."

"Where was Edmund at this time?" inquired Mr. Gumbridge; and it was Detective Blowitz who made quick reply, —

"He was probably busy saving some other ingrate from drowning."

Archer's face flushed, but he ignored the fling.

"In one corner of the trunk was a knotted handkerchief filled with pebbles, some of which had, no doubt, been gathered on the seashore."

"Edmund always does that for his little cousin, Dottie Bainbridge, of whom he is very fond."

"And in the center was — the black diamond."

"Have you got it with you?"

"I should say I have," replied Archer, shoving one hand into his inner breast pocket; "and there she is!"

As he spoke he sprang to his feet, opened a brown piece of paper, and, stepping forward, laid it on the table in the middle of the room. Then retreating to his chair, he leaned back to enjoy his victory, which he was certain would make his fortune. Mr. Gumbridge rose and quickly walked to the table, with Detective Blowitz at his side. Extending his hand he picked up the stone and held it between his forefinger and thumb. As he did so, the expression of amazement on his face gave way to infinite disgust, and, looking at the expectant detective, he thundered:—

"And you call that a diamond, do you? You idiot! it is nothing but a worthless pebble."

"Confound it, but that's too rich!" and Detective Blowitz almost fell to the floor with laughter, which was never more genuine in his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a scene worthy of the best efforts of a photographer, who could have made a good thing of an instantaneous view. Detective Blowitz, after a look at the round, black pebble the size of a robin's egg, leaned forward, slapped his knee, and then slowly walked backward, so doubled up with mirth that he would have fallen to the floor, had he not reached his chair in the nick of time. Dropping into that, and still shaking with merriment, he let his head fall back at a frightful risk of dislocating his neck, and continued his collapse of jollity, barely able to gurgle, —

“Confound it! that's too rich!”

Mr. Gumbridge, his form at its full height, his head thrown back, with the pebble in front of him, between forefinger and thumb, glowered at the astounded young man, and demanded in a voice of thunder, —

“And you call that a diamond, do you? You intolerable idiot! it is nothing but a worthless pebble!”

And Josiah Archer! The blow which Edmund Melton gave him between the eyes, when he was in the agony of drowning, was not more stupefying than that which hit him now. He sat dazed for a moment or two,

his lower jaw drooping, his eyes bulging, and his voice mute. Then he staggered to his feet, stepped unsteadily to the table, and gaping at the indignant broker, faltered, —

“Wh - wh - wh - what did you say?”

Gumbridge was boiling with rage to that extent that he hardly dared trust himself to speak for a few seconds; and all the time there came a chuckling sound, like that of some gibbering imp, from Detective Blowitz's chair, where that gentleman was alternately letting his head go as far back as possible over the top of his support, and then snap forward, after the so-called graceful style of a famous dancer. Accompanying this performance was a violent slapping of one knee with his hand, an earthquake of laughter, and an extension of mouth that no minstrel could ever hope to excel. Clearly the famous detective had just heard the best joke of his life. He tried to speak several times, but had to give it up. Finally, he deliberately flung his hat on the floor, stamped one foot in it, and shook his head from side to side, as if flinging the moisture from his locks.

“Humph!” snorted Mr. Gumbridge, “have you ever seen a diamond?”

“Of course I have,” replied Archer, whose quick recovery of himself was due mostly to the exasperating mirth of Blowitz; “but I never saw a black diamond.”

“And never will.”

“What’s the matter with that?” demanded the young detective, growing angry and very red in the face, as he realized the situation in which he had placed himself.

“What’s the matter with that?” repeated Mr. Gumbridge, as he flung it contemptuously on the floor, “nothing, except that it is no more a diamond than you are a man of sense. After this poor boy had saved you from drowning, you sneaked into his room, unlocked his trunk, and stole a pebble that he had picked up on the seashore to give to his little cousin. You ought to be put in jail for sneak-thieving, for Edmund Melton is no more a thief than I am.”

Detective Blowitz’s merriment subsided like a flash, and bounding across the room, he impetuously extended his hand toward the speaker.

“Shake, shake! I’m with you on that!”

The two clasped hands and looked into each other’s eyes. Then, without the trace of a smile on the face of either, they turned toward Archer, who was standing on the other side of the table, growing madder and madder as the broker approached better humor.

“I’d like to know,” said he, “what there is so funny in such a mistake as that” —

“You haven’t seen me laugh, have you?” asked the jeweler, in a much calmer tone than he had used just before.

“No; but Blowitz nearly burst his sides” —

“Josiah, my good but verdant friend,” interrupted the detective pleadingly, “don’t refer to it or I shall be off again, and another such spell as that will be the death of me. Hew close to the line of your discourse, but spare me, oh, spare me!”

Now, it is only fair to say that the mistake of Detective Archer was not such a strange one after all. If any of my readers should ever see a black diamond in the rough, — that is, before it is cut and polished, — he would be quite apt to pronounce it a pebble, for the resemblance is close. One of those gems, displayed some years ago in New York, looked for all the world like an ordinary stone, except that a small part on one side was polished to show the true nature of the diamond. When Archer opened the trunk of young Melton and saw the inky pebble, a misgiving as to its character never entered his mind. He had already decided that the youth was guilty; and when one starts with that theory, he is apt to find that subsequent discoveries and facts appear to fit it wondrously close. He had not been told that the diamond was cut and polished, and the pebble was about the size of the gem when in its natural state. Hence, I say, his error was excusable when all the circumstances are remembered.

“Josiah,” said Detective Blowitz, laying his hand on his shoulder, and speaking with the gravity of a judge, “take my advice and adopt the profession of diamond expert; it will pay you better.”

"You are only jealous because you thought I had beaten you," retorted the young man with flaming face; "and as for you, Mr. Gumbridge, you want to cheat me out of the reward for my discovery."

"I'm afraid, Gumbridge, he has got it down fine on us," said Detective Blowitz, looking reproachfully at the broker.

"I'm afraid so, but I will fix it."

The gentleman's good-nature had come back to him. Stepping to the other side of the room, he picked up the pebble from the floor, came back, and extended it to Archer.

"Allow me to present you with the black diamond which you have so brilliantly discovered. Your skill and faithfulness shall not go unrewarded."

With one angry sweep of his hand, the young man sent the pebble spinning across the room. "You may go to blazes for all I care, both of you!" he exclaimed, wheeling about and dashing out. He slammed the door after him by way of emphasis to his words, and strode angrily down the hall-stairs. Mr. Blowitz has not met him since; but from some inquiries he made a few months afterward, he learned that the aspiring young detective had taken up the calling of life-insurance solicitor, and was doing quite well.

"Well, isn't that a go?" said the detective after the man passed out and he and his friend had resumed their

seats. "It is the most absurd thing I ever heard of, but I am glad."

"So am I," was the hearty response.

Truth to tell, a crushing weight had been lifted from the heart of each, and the rebound was too great for either to conceal it. They had settled themselves in the belief that Melton was guilty; and the sudden discovery that he was not, or at least that he had not yet been proven so, was a respite from anguish.

But now, when they came to talk calmly over the situation, a painful feeling returned to both; for, while the question remained unsettled, suspicion still pointed strongly toward the youth. The other clerks had cleared their skirts, but it could not be denied that Melton had spent the night of the robbery in New York.

"It looks strange that he did not stay at his own home, and it is queer that he visited the city when he must find the seashore so enjoyable."

"All he has to do is to make known the reason of his visit, and prove where he was at midnight. Certainly there can be no difficulty in that."

"I hope not; but, Gumbridge, suppose he cannot."

"For Heaven's sake, don't hint such propositions," protested the broker impatiently; "I have suffered enough already. Time enough when we are compelled to face it."

“Still, I am afraid it must come to that. If it should be proven that he has done this thing, Gumbridge, we must save him.”

“How?”

“Let him restore the gem, promise never again to yield to temptation of that sort, and we’ll keep his secret for him. You can tell McFarlane, and any one else who knows of the loss, that you found it where you didn’t expect to, and that will be the end of it.”

“I have never compromised a thing of this kind.”

“Because you never had the chance; if you count upon my help, you can have it only on this condition.”

“I agree to it; the saving of a human soul from death is worth more than all the diamonds from the mines of Golconda and Kimberley.”

“Your sentiments do you credit; and now, Gumbridge, I shall take the next train for Ocean Beach.”

“God be with you!” was the fervent parting of the jeweler as the two shook hands.

That same afternoon Detective Blowitz registered at the Hotel Columbia, Ocean Beach, (now Belmar).

CHAPTER XIV.

THE sultry August afternoon was drawing to a close, and the Pennsylvania, the Central, and the New Jersey southern trains, as they glided along the seashore railway so close that they were most always in sight of each other, were crowded with passengers eager to escape the smothering heat of the metropolis, and reach a place where the cool breezes of the ocean bring rest, refreshment, vigor, and new life to the jaded frame.

On the long, upper piazza of the Columbia House, facing the avenue, but still in full view of the Atlantic, and open to its delightful breath, sat two persons. They were far down the piazza, close together, and spoke in low tones, so that no one could possibly overhear a single word uttered. One was Detective Blowitz, who, as was his favorite custom, leaned back with his feet crossed on the railing in front. The other at his side was Edmund Melton, whose shapely feet rested on the floor, and who listened with deep interest to the words of his new acquaintance.

Detective Blowitz had carried out his purpose of going to Ocean Beach and seeking out the young man.

His heart warmed to him at once; for he was his very ideal of a boy, manly, bright, handsome, and modest to a degree.) There was not a person at the seaside who had ever met him who did not like him. He had played a match game of ball that afternoon, against a club at Spring Lake, composed of several ex-professionals; and it was conceded by all that it was his superior work that won the contest, while three of the four runs which did the business were made by him. He had refused to allow a photographer to take his picture, because some one told him it was to be used in an illustrated paper, and he pleasantly but firmly declined to talk with the reporters, who wanted the particulars of his exploit of the day before.

When Detective Blowitz approached and requested a private talk, he asked with a smile, —

“Is it about that little affair of yesterday?”

“No; upon an altogether different matter; I’ll promise you to make no reference to it.”

“Very well, then I am at your service;” and the two made their way to the topmost piazza, and seated themselves in the secluded spot as I have described.

Detective Blowitz first told how the black diamond had been taken from the safe of Shipman & Gumbridge two nights before, and how rigid investigation cleared Gibbons and McCutcheon from all suspicion.

“That brings matters to this point,” continued the

officer, speaking softly, but with the utmost kindness of tone ; “suspicion is directed toward you.”

“And why?” asked Melton, swallowing a lump that came in his throat, and holding his nerves under control.

“You were in New York that night, you did not stay at your own home, and you are one of the only five living persons who possess the combination to the safe in which the black diamond was locked.”

“How do you know I did not stay at my uncle’s?” asked the lad, whose face had grown slightly pale, but who looked unfalteringly in that of the detective.

“Inquiry was made at your home, and the servants in charge said you had not been there since you left for this place.”

“That is the fact ; I have not. I was in New York that night, and I may have to go again to-morrow ; but that has nothing to do with my regular business there.”

Detective Blowitz was quick to catch the last sentences, which contained an intimation that he would visit the metropolis the next day on the same business that took him thither two days before.

“You cannot fail to see how bad the case looks for you, my dear boy. Mr. Gumbridge is as deeply interested and moved as I am. I have lived longer than you, and know what temptations often assail those in



Detective Blowitz saw before him a middle aged lady.

your situation. Although I have never seen you until this afternoon, I hope you will consider me a friend, and believe me when I assure you there is nothing in my power that I will not gladly do to save you from this threatened ruin. Mr. Gumbridge and I are the only ones besides yourself who need know the truth; and if you show the proper spirit, we will help you.” —

“Stop!” commanded Melton, showing excitement for the first time; “your words show that you think I am the one who took the diamond.”

“How can I help believing it? How can Mr. Gumbridge fail to believe it? Do you deny it?”

“I do; I have never looked upon the black diamond since the last day I spent in the store over a week ago. It is strange that for the first time in my life I should be accused of a crime which I would no more commit than that of murder.”

These were brave words, and Detective Blowitz was glad to hear them; but the matter was by no means finished.

“No one hopes more fervently than I that you can prove what you say. All that you have to do is to tell where you spent that eventful night. That shown, and the painful business is ended, so far as you are concerned.”

To the intense disappointment of the gentleman the boy remained silent for two or three minutes. What

would not the detective have given to know what was passing in his mind? Ah, if he had but known!

"I beg you not to hesitate," said the detective in the kindest of tones; "believe me your friend, anxious to help you: whatever you may choose to make known will be received in the strictest confidence."

"I would like to tell you where I spent the night," finally said the youth in a low voice, "but I cannot."

"Think twice before you refuse. I know how prone lads of your age are to indulge in little escapades which naturally they do not wish known; I have charity for such; and I will promise you that neither Mr. Gumbridge nor Colonel Bainbridge shall learn anything about it from me."

"I appreciate your offer and your promise; but I cannot tell you, not on account of myself, but because of another."

What did this mean? The detective was mystified, but unwilling to give up the task he had set for himself. The lad's fate was hanging in the balance, and he alone could decide whether it should be for weal or woe.

"I cannot conceive of any reason strong enough to justify you in refusing what I ask. A false pride in a matter which can be of no importance impels you to keep your lips closed, when by speaking you can save yourself from shame and your friends from disgrace.

Nay, you have the choice of ruin or salvation; and if you choose the former you have no one to blame but yourself."

Again young Melton was silent for some time. He sat motionless, looking off at the foam of the breakers and the happy swarms of people sauntering to and fro on the plank walk, lolling in the sand, or grouped under the shade of the pavilion. He was deeply pondering one of the most momentous questions that had ever been forced upon him.

Detective Blowitz prayed that he might reach the right decision. Perhaps he did, but it was not what the gentleman so ardently desired.

He held his peace and puffed his cigar; for he was unable to add anything to the words just spoken.

"Mr. Blowitz," said he in a low voice, in which there was just the suspicion of a tremor, "I thank you for what you have said, but I refuse absolutely to tell you where I passed that night, until — until a certain expected event takes place. If that event doesn't take place, I shall never tell you; if it does, I will speak, but it is useless to press me: I refuse, and am ready to take the consequences. If you wish it I will go back to New York with you this evening, and submit to arrest, without making you any trouble over a requisition, or whatever might be necessary if I declined to go except by such means."

“No; stay here and finish your vacation: I hope you will enjoy it and come out of the fire unscathed. Your decision is final?”

“It is.”

“Then I must bid you good-day.”

They shook hands, and Detective Blowitz was back in New York that same evening.

CHAPTER XV.

DETECTIVE BLOWITZ did not call on his friend Gumbidge that night, but left him a note at the Astor House, saying that he had seen young Melton, who strenuously denied the imputed crime, but his explanations were not wholly satisfactory. He begged the diamond broker to make no move and say nothing to any one else for a few days, or at least until he heard further from him.

“The young man dropped a sentence or two,” reflected the officer as he made his way homeward, “which may prove important. He said he might have to visit the city to-morrow on the same business that took him there the other day. Very well; if he does, I shall keep track of him.”

Among the loungers at Courtlandt Street and the adjoining ferries the next day, was a man with a jet-black mustache, that evidently was dyed, for his hair was of auburn tinge, and with a sporting outfit that gave him the appearance of one waiting to see a friend going to or coming from the Monmouth races. Few, indeed, would have suspected the individual to be Detective Blowitz; but it was he. He had little idle time on his

hands ; for, as you doubtless know, there are three landing-places for passengers coming from the New Jersey seaside resorts. One is the Pennsylvania, at the foot of Courtlandt Street ; while that of the Central Railway adjoins, and the New Jersey Southern is just beyond, at the foot of Rector Street.

By moving very lively, the detective was able to be at each of these in turn, and gain a look at the incoming passengers. It kept him swinging back and forth like an animated pendulum ; and twice he narrowly missed making thorough work, since the Southern and Pennsylvania landed two train-loads almost simultaneously. It was not until the afternoon was half gone that success crowned his vigilance. The arrivals at that hour were few, for the bulk of the travel from the seaside is citywards in the morning, and in the opposite direction in the afternoon and evening ; but among the score or more of passengers that came stringing out of the ferry-house, and began picking their way across the eternally crowded West Street, was Edmund Melton, as handsome, manly, and attractive as ever. He had no baggage with him, so that the watcher concluded he meant to make only a brief stay in the city.

The detective thought the face of the lad was paler than usual ; but the sun had so bronzed him that it was hard to decide that important question. There could be no doubt, however, that he was wide awake and on

the alert. He glanced furtively to the right and left, and cast a scrutinizing glance in the face of every man he met, as if suspicious of him, or as though he were looking for some one.

"He fears being shadowed," thought Blowitz; "it doesn't look well for him, and I shall see that he doesn't elude me."

Melton fell in behind the endless procession, and walked briskly up Courtlandt Street toward Broadway. He halted at the corner, and looked searchingly about him again.

"He isn't neglecting any precaution; he's a sharp one."

Apparently everything was satisfactory, and the lad crossed Broadway, walked by the *Herald* building, and kept on in the direction of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Third Avenue Elevated Railway. Blowitz stuck close at his heels; for a few seconds are sometimes enough to shut one out from catching a car on either of these structures. In another place it might be safe to drop farther to the rear, but not there.

The haste, however, was unnecessary. After depositing his ticket in the box of the elevated, both Melton and Blowitz were obliged to wait several minutes before their train pulled out and started up-town. During the interval that the lad was on the platform, he scrutinized those standing and passing him, and among them the

detective, who assumed a nonchalance which disarmed any suspicion Melton may have otherwise felt. Blowitz sat down a short distance from his man, and occupied himself apparently with admiring the scenery of the Bowery, as they were whirled along its picturesque length. Not once did he look directly at the youth, but he took care to keep him within his field of vision.

At Houston Street Edmund was among the half-dozen in his car who left the train. The officer was a few paces behind him, and began descending the stairs while the lad was going down the lower steps. Instead of starting off at once, Melton's actions showed that he was expecting some one to meet him at that crowded place. He stood several minutes looking up and down the cross streets, and then strolled aimlessly up-town; going but a short way when he turned about and came back in the same indolent fashion. He was not kept waiting long. A young man made his way carefully across the avenue, apparently coming from Broadway. He walked with the help of a cane, and evidently was quite weak, as though recovering from illness.

"Ah, ha," thought the detective, as he recognized James McCutcheon, clerk for Shipman & Gumbidge, "he is in it too!"

The instant Melton caught sight of him, he hurried forward, and the two met within six feet of where Detective Blowitz stood, as if waiting for a down-

town car. He was able to overhear their greeting and a few words more.

“How do you feel, Jim?”

“A good deal better, thank you; there’s no need of asking you, for you are always the picture of rugged health.”

“Yes, thank Providence; I am favored that way, but this is a bad break in my vacation.”

“What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you know I am accused of taking the black diamond? I am, and a detective visited me at Ocean Beach to try to get me to confess.”

“You don’t say!” exclaimed the other in pained surprise; “but you were able to satisfy him of course that he was wrong.”

“There’s just the trouble; I couldn’t do it; but come, I’m afraid we’ll be late, and we can talk on the way.”

The two turned to the east up Houston Street, and walked slowly side by side.

Blowitz would have been only too glad to keep near enough to overhear their conversation, but he dared not risk it. The moment suspicion was directed toward him, the game would be up. The wise detective knows just how far to go, and when to stop. A trifle too much ardor on the part of these gentry has spoiled more than one case. Besides, he reflected, the lads were going toward some place, which, of itself, was certain to give

the clew he was seeking. All he had to do for the present, was to keep them within sight, and interesting developments must follow.

Accordingly he dropped back and allowed them to get far enough in advance for a number of people to keep continually between, several of whom were going in the same direction. Most of these passed the couple, because Melton graduated his pace to suit that of his invalid friend.

But sharp as was Edmund Melton, his companion McCutcheon was sharper, at least on this occasion. He had noted the sporting-looking man with the dyed mustache and auburn hair who stood near them when they met under the elevated railway, and who seemed anxious to catch a down-town car, but, instead of doing so, turned and strolled after them. Glancing back, McCutcheon discovered that he was still behind them, and he made known his suspicions to Melton. The latter took a glance at him, and said in an excited undertone, —

“I saw that man at the Courtlandt-street Ferry and the down-town station, where I got on.”

“He’s a detective that is shadowing you; it won’t do for us to go any farther.”

“I must go, Jim; you know it: but I believe I can manage to give him the slip.”

“We’ll have to separate, for I can’t do any dodging or running till I am stronger.”

“All right; keep on for a little way, and I’ll turn back. He won’t fool me; I’ll telegraph you, if necessary.”

Detective Blowitz was quick to see that something was wrong; and when he observed Melton walking briskly toward him, he was nonplussed for the moment. It would not do for him to turn at once, so he crossed the street and walked a few rods before facing about.

Melton was going fast, and evidently for the station of the elevated railway. Blowitz hastened his own pace; but he was still some distance away when he saw the young man going like a shot up the steps. Luck was with the lad just then. A train was starting up town as he dashed through the gate, and he was just in time to catch it, while Detective Blowitz, much to his chagrin, was just in time to be too late to do the same.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEANWHILE, an extraordinary thing happened to Mr. Wilton Gumbridge, junior partner in the wealthy diamond and jewelry establishment of Shipman & Gumbridge.

Enough has been told to show that he was as much wrought up over the turn of events as was Detective Blowitz. It may be no special credit to him to say that he would have been glad to lose the value of the black diamond several times over, if by that means he could establish the innocence of Edmund Melton, whom he loved as a son. He pondered long in his room at the Astor House over the note received from Detective Blowitz. He read it again and again, and was struck with the fact that the lad had strenuously denied having taken the stone.

“To me,” he said, “that constitutes the strongest proof of his innocence; for I never knew a boy who scorned a falsehood as does he. He may have imbibed it from his uncle, who was a West Pointer, where they teach that lying and stealing are two unpardonable crimes; but more likely he inherited it from his mother, one of the noblest women I ever knew. I have said

that I didn't believe Edmund would tell a deliberate lie to save his life, and I believed it until"—

He hesitated, unwilling to confess that a doubt had crept into his mind.

"I suppose any one would say that when a man steals, he will lie to save himself; and it may be that if the poor boy resolved on this crime, he resolved to brave it out to the end, and of course that can be done only by a continuous course of deception."

Conjure his brains as he might, the only possible explanation he could make (and oh, how flimsy that was!) was that either he or one of his clerks had accidentally given the combination to some one who had availed himself of this means to secure the black diamond.

"Is it possible? Much as I would like to believe it, I must confess that I cannot. We have four letters, x, c, v, and b, thereby differing from the usual practice of our neighbors with their numerals. I have never written them on a piece of paper, and have forbidden the boys ever to do so. The way we remember them is by taking the letter x as it occurs on our Remington typewriter, and then the next three at the right. There's our combination.

"What chance is there of any one figuring out that they are the right ones? Gibbons undertook to make the calculation once; but when he found it was running

into the millions, and heavens knows how much farther, and that it would take an active man thousands of years, working night and day, he gave it up.

"I never heard of even three letters or figures being discovered by experiment, so there's no consolation in that direction," added the broker with a sigh. "I confess I am at my wits' end."

Restless and uneasy, he descended the elevator, and strolled up Broadway. He was disposed to call on Detective Blowitz; but since that gentleman had not invited him to do so, he was too sensitive to intrude. The probability, too, was that the detective was off on business connected with the missing diamond.

➤ When Mr. Gumbridge reached the hotel it was late, and he saw that half a dozen letters were in his box. He took the package without glancing at the superscriptions, and, shoving them into his coat pocket, sauntered to the elevator, intending to read them in his room. On his way down Broadway a strange fancy had come into his brain, one which he hoped might solve the whole mystery. He asked himself whether he could have left his room at midnight and gone to the store, opened the safe, and brought away the gem? Such somnambulistic feats have been performed before, when the most amazed individual was the actor himself on learning the truth.

"I have never heard that I was addicted to sleep-

walking when a child, and I recall nothing of the kind since. Now, it would be a funny thing if it should turn out that I was the scoundrel who robbed my safe."

He smiled at the thought, and continued, —

"If I stole it, where the mischief have I hidden it? If I am a first-class thief, what business have I to accuse others? Why am I not arrested and railroaded to Sing Sing?"

This light mood speedily passed off. When in the elevator, he asked of the boy who it was that was on duty two nights before between ten and morning. The lad reflected a moment, and then said, "Jim."

"Where is he now?"

"It's his turn, and he goes on again to-night at ten."

The gentleman handed the lad a half-dollar.

"When he comes, send him to my room, and run the elevator for him till I am through with him. I won't keep him more than ten minutes."

The boy was glad to promise; for it then lacked only a few minutes of the hour for Jim to assume charge of the elevator, and he expected to see him when he descended to the lower floor.

Shortly after Mr. Gumbridge entered his room and threw himself in his easy-chair there was a timid knock on his door.

"Come in!" he called; and the elevator boy, whom he knew very well, smilingly entered, hat in hand, and

stood waiting the pleasure of the gentleman who was always so ready to remember him and his fellows in the way of tips.

“Jim,” said the broker pleasantly, “you have a pretty good memory I believe, and I am not going to tax it very hard, but I want you to be sure you are right. Perhaps this will help you.”

And he handed him a half-dollar. Jim grinned more than ever, and said, —

“I’m always glad to do my best for you, Mr. Gumbridge.”

“I want you to remember two nights ago.”

“That’s Tuesday night; yes, sir: I ran the elevator that night.”

“Do you remember my going up with you?”

“Yes, sir; it was shortly after ten o’clock when I went on duty.”

“Do you remember my coming down again an hour or two later?”

Jim’s eyes opened to their widest extent.

“You didn’t go down with me, sir.”

“Think hard, now, for I don’t want any mistake made; I am not sure, but I have an impression, that I went down with you some time after, and did not go up until after midnight.

“I couldn’t go up and down with you without your remembering it?”

"No sir; no one couldn't do that."

"Then you remember my second trip on Tuesday night?"

"No, sir. Mr. Gumbridge, you didn't come downstairs in the elevator or go up with me that night after the first time, which was just after I took charge."

"That's all; thanks, and you may go."

"That last refuge is gone," sighed the gentleman when alone. "Of course if I was a somnambulist I might have used the stairs, but I didn't. It wasn't I who stole the black diamond."

"I declare! I forgot that I had a number of letters to read."

And he thrust in his hand and drew several forth. Only his personal mail was sent to the hotel, and of course he was interested in everything that thus reached him. The first letter he opened was from his wife, who, with the children, was absent in the country. He was glad to learn that all were well, and anxious for Saturday night to come, when he would be with them over Sunday. Another scrawl was from his little daughter; and he smiled with happiness and gratitude when he spelled out the almost illegible words, breathing such sweet affection and love that the tears came to his eyes.

There were others, which it is not necessary to refer to, as they could be of no interest to the reader. But

> the extraordinary thing which I referred to at the opening of this chapter was that there was one letter which Mr. Gumbridge did not read. X In drawing the package from his pocket, the missive slipped to the floor unnoticed, falling under the chair, where he did not observe it when preparing for bed. It was still unseen when he left his room in the morning for his store. The chambermaid flung it, with the newspapers which lay on the floor, into the waste-basket, and it was carried out and emptied, as is the custom, into the receptacle in the hall, and afterward burned. > Page 231.

Had that letter been read by the broker, I should be spared the telling of what followed. On such seemingly slight incidents does our fate often turn!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE wise detective, no matter how skillful, must always be prepared for defeat, at the very moment, perhaps, when he is most confident of success. Where brains, experience, and mental acuteness are pitted against him, it would be strange, indeed, if he did not sometimes fail. Were it otherwise, crime would not dare array itself against the law.

Detective Blowitz had been cleverly fooled in his effort to shadow Edmund Melton, and he could not deny it. But he was a philosopher, and made the best of it.

"I slipped this time, my young friend," he mused, "but I am not through with you yet, and I'll get there all the same."

He wanted no further proof that it would not do for him to attempt anything farther in that line in his present guise. Whatever further shadowing of the lad was essayed must be in a different character altogether. Accordingly, he boarded the first up-town train that came along, went to his own home, ate his dinner, and, as there was considerable of daylight remaining, he made a working-man of himself. That is to say, when

he came forth he was in the dress of a common laborer. It was a character which he assumed on special occasions only ; but it was one of his most successful ones. He had never failed to mislead those whom he wished to mislead, and for that reason he reserved it for special occasions.

“If Mr. Edmund Melton or James McCutcheon identify me now, they will be the first to do so.”

It was hardly to be supposed that young Melton would show himself in the neighborhood of Houston Street again. More than likely he had returned to the seaside to get all that was to be gotten out of what remained of his vacation, with the heavy burden resting on his heart.

“But I don’t know about that,” reflected the detective, quickening his pace to catch the down-town train ; “I prevented his making the visit, which he must have been exceedingly anxious to make, or he would not have come all the way from Ocean Beach for that purpose. His journey down-town was to throw me off his track ; and what more probable than that he has returned to carry out his plan before going to the seashore ? Why was I so stupid as not to think of this sooner ? ”

It was curious indeed that so obvious a theory had not occurred to him before. It might not be too late yet to make amends for his carelessness. The moment

he stepped off the train at Houston Street, he looked about for either or both of the boys. Neither was in sight; and, recalling the course they had taken before turning about, he walked eastward. He moved rapidly, for time was valuable, and he had wasted a good deal of it. The trip to Thirty-fourth Street and back took more than an hour, but he could have shortened it by one half, had he retained his wits. He kept on and on; and, when beyond the point where the lads changed their course, he studied both sides of the street closely.

“It is probably somewhere in this vicinity that he stopped, if he came back, and I shall be fortunate if I catch him coming out—more fortunate, indeed, than I can hope. Confound it!”

It was a genuine surprise when, not a hundred feet away, he caught sight of Edmund Melton walking toward him. The boy had made his call, and was returning from it at that moment.

The lad was moving fast, as though in great haste, and there was little doubt that he was making for the elevated railway. The detective saw that he had not been noticed by Melton, and, with something of his old quickness of perception and motion, he turned and took the same course, graduating his gait, so as to allow the lad to pass him just as the Bowery was reached. The youth hurried across the street, skipped up the steps

of the station, and impatiently walked up and down while waiting for the train. He glanced at his watch frequently, but paid no attention to the man in a laborer's dress, who seemed to be much interested in examining the newspapers on the stand.

The first train to arrive was for South Ferry. Melton did not board that, and the detective was almost certain that he was trying to catch the last train for the seashore. When the City Hall train followed, he was one of the first to enter it, Blowitz placing himself at the opposite end of the same car. He was on the watch to observe whether the lad left at any of the way-stations, for this haste, after all, might be pretended; but he kept his seat and appeared to be in a brown study. Venturing to steal a look at the attractive face, the officer was surprised to see unmistakable traces of tears. Several times he took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes.

"He must have been stirred by something to feel grief like that," reflected the watcher; "can it be because he sees that fate is closing round him, and that the first step he has taken in crime is a fatal one?"

Once Melton was so moved that he held his handkerchief to his eyes for several minutes; but as they approached the City Hall station, he roused himself and became wide awake, and as impatient as when hurrying along Houston Street. He went down the steps at

a pace which taxed the detective's agility to the utmost, and then sped across the park toward Broadway. He did not look behind him, and cast only one glance at the City Hall clock, to compare it with his watch which he snatched out of his pocket "on the fly," as may be said. Along Broadway he hurried, and, reaching Courtlandt Street, crossed it diagonally, as a belated passenger does when the minutes at his command are few.

Almost any one in the situation of Detective Blowitz would have drawn off at this point, believing it useless to continue farther, since there seemingly could be no doubt of Melton's destination; but this taking seeming facts for granted has played the mischief with more than one well-laid plan. The pursuer never let up till he saw the boy pass through the ferry entrance, halt an instant while his ticket was punched, and then shoot like a deer through the waiting-room, and fairly leap through the ferry gates which snapped behind him like a steel trap. Detective Blowitz could not have followed him if he had wished, but he was satisfied, by this time, that he had gone far enough. The boat caught by Melton was the last one that connected with the late train for the seashore.

"I have no more doubt that he is going there than I have that I am the most befuddled man in the city of New York. This is the hardest stone-wall I ever bumped my crown against, but it's got to give way,"

he added, compressing his lips and shaking his head, while his bright eyes snapped and he muttered, "Confound it!"

He deemed it best to see Mr. Gumbridge, since he feared the gentleman might feel slighted at his apparent neglect.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked that individual, when his caller had told his story.

"I confess that I was never more mystified in my life. The fancy came to me when in the elevator to ask you whether you are a somnambulist."

The host shook his head with a smile.

"I have worked that theory, in the hope that I might have tried my hand at sleep-walking; but I obtained proof that after entering my room on Tuesday night last I never left it until Wednesday morning."

"The boy asserted his innocence in the most solemn manner, but could not be induced to tell where he spent the night. There is the key to the whole business. If I could discover that fact the question would be settled."

"It strikes me that the most ordinary detective could do that much."

Blowitz took care to make known nothing about his failure to shadow Melton, after following him to Houston Street. There was no need of the gentleman knowing it; besides which, the officer feared that the employer, in his goodness of heart, would spoil everything by trying to find out for himself."

"I hope I shall do so before long. Meanwhile, the lad is not to be molested in any way."

"Of course not, for that would block all investigation. I don't wish his uncle to learn anything of it until it is settled one way or the other."

"There is no need of his hearing, for we have only to keep our mouths closed ; and I reckon we know how to do that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next morning, when Mr. Gumbridge walked down to his store, he was surprised to find his two clerks McCutcheon and Melton in charge. The elder had picked up so fast in strength that he concluded to resume duties that day, while Melton lopped a little off his vacation for reasons best known to himself.

The boy's face flushed slightly when he stepped forward and took the hand of his employer, but otherwise he was the same frank, self-possessed youth of old.

"I have only one thing to say, Mr. Gumbridge," he remarked loud enough for the other clerk to hear; "if you can't believe I am innocent, don't believe me guilty until you receive further light. Do you wish me to stay with you?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman, following the counsel of Blowitz; "go right on as before: the world shall never know anything of this sad business from me. When you are ready to speak, I shall be ready to listen."

The broker had considered this matter before, and decided what to say and do when he met the boy. If he was discharged, his guardian would demand the

cause, and a tempest would be precipitated whose result could not be foreseen. Besides, with the lad following his every-day routine, the detective would have a ten-fold better chance to work successfully.

Employer and employee, by a common understanding, agreed that no further reference was to be made to the matter by either of them, until some definite stage was attained and the boy's guilt or innocence established.

Mr. Gumbridge complimented the youth, of whom he could not help feeling fond, despite the dark cloud hanging over him, for his daring and skill in saving the life of the drowning person at Ocean Beach. Edmund parried the glowing words as best he could, and hastened to say, —

“Since you were good enough to allow us three to arrange our vacations to suit ourselves, we have done it thus : Gibbons started early this morning for the fishing-banks, and expects to be gone two weeks ; and on his return McCutcheon will take his outing.”

“James looks as if he is in more need of it than either of you,” said Mr. Gumbridge.

“That's just it,” replied McCutcheon ; “I am not quite strong enough to enjoy my vacation as I wish to, and I'd rather stay here in New York until I am.”

“That's the oddest doctrine I've heard in a long time ; but if it suits you, I have no objection.”

“I have picked up rapidly within the last twenty-

four hours, and am quite sure of being myself in a day or two more."

"Since Edmund has given up a part of his vacation, why not take that which is left? It may be just what you need."

"You are very kind, but I couldn't accept it after what you have done; I prefer to stay with Edmund."

Mr. Gumbridge suspected that this was the real reason for McCutcheon appearing at the store. He knew that Melton was coming home sooner than he intended, and he wished to be at his side when the storm broke. The two had always been fond of each other, and he was glad to see such true friendship.

"Something tells me that Edmund will need him before this wretched business is done with; possibly it will crush both. God pity us all!"

"Boys," said Mr. Gumbridge, some minutes later, "I'm going in the country to my family, and you may not see me for a week or two. I leave everything in your hands."

And bidding them good-by, he passed out upon the street and made his way to the Astor House.

"Blowitz told me to give the signal-call to no one, but how can I help it? The clerks have to know it or shut up shop. I feel so desperate that I don't care much what they do; they may run off with everything in the safe, burn the store, and start a riot in New

York, and I won't kick. Here I'm staying in the city like a fool, with Shipman touring through Europe, and my family pining for me in the country. I've fooled them with the plea of business as long as I can. I'll leave a note for Blowitz, telling him not to write or telegraph me until he knows who stole the black diamond. It makes no difference whether he gets it or not, but I shall never be satisfied till we discover the thief."

The gentleman carried out this resolution. That afternoon his family were delighted to see him a day sooner than they expected, and delighted still more, when he told them that he intended to stay a week or two with them. And now, since he is pleasantly established among the cool groves and woods and hills of the country, we will leave him there for a while and give attention elsewhere.

"I'm glad he's gone," was the first remark of McCutcheon, "for now we shall have a better chance to do what we want."

"Do you think we are watched?" asked Melton.

"I am sure of it; that's the trouble. Ever since you entered the store, I have been keeping a lookout. A man, dressed like a laborer, has passed three times, and though he didn't turn his head, I saw him glance through the door twice. He's the one that is shadowing you and maybe both of us."

Detective Blowitz had managed his scheme so well the day before, that Melton had no recollection of having seen him at the time, so the words of McCutcheon surprised him less than would be supposed. "If we go away separately, he can't follow us."

"There may be a couple of them for that very contingency."

"What kind of a looking fellow is this man you suspect?"

"See, there he goes now! Don't let him discover he's suspected!"

Edmund caught sight of Detective Blowitz (for it was he) as he plodded heavily forward, his head down as if lost in thought, but not enough so to prevent his darting a side glance into the store as he passed the open door.

"That's the fellow we've got to look out for," said McCutcheon guardedly, when he was beyond sight.

Detective Blowitz was serenely confident that his identity was unsuspected; but the first time when his disguise was penetrated had come sooner than he dreamed. He did not know enough of the young man, McCutcheon, to learn that he was what might be called a natural born detective. Already his wonderful acuteness had baffled the veteran in the service, and was destined to do things in the near future that would make him open his eyes wider than ever before.

"You were right about that fellow yesterday, Jim, and you may be about this one to-day."

"Why do you separate them, Ned, when they are one and the same?"

"How can you know that?" asked the surprised Melton; "I cannot see the least resemblance between them."

"Both the disguises were clever; but there is something, which I cannot describe, that gives him away."

"Shall we leave the store separately or together?"

"Separately; for if this gentleman intends to play the watch on you, I'm going to try the same thing on him."

Melton laughed.

"How is that possible, Jim? You are not strong, and you can't alter your appearance as he does."

"I'm strong enough to do what I have in mind, and as to whether I can disguise myself so as to deceive him, that remains to be seen; but at present I have no intention of trying it."

When Melton went out to lunch, he observed the laborer hovering on the other side of the street. He took care not to let the detective know he was suspected. McCutcheon was not shadowed on the similar trip he made.

"There's only one of them," he decided, later in the afternoon; "so if you can throw him off, the road is clear."

A half-hour later a district-messenger boy sauntered into the store and asked, —

“Does that feller live here?”

He held up an envelope, on which Melton saw his name written. He receipted, paid for it, and then opened the missive, which was short and to the point, —

“Come at once.

W. F. *Elmer* *P 211*

“What shall I do?” asked the youth, handing the message to his friend. “I know what’s the matter, and I ought to be there this minute; but that detective will follow me and spoil everything.”

“Wait a moment,” replied McCutcheon, stepping quickly to the door and peeping cautiously out.

He saw the pretended laborer on the other side of the street watching the messenger boy like a hawk. He kept glancing at the store, as if debating whether it would be safe to leave it unguarded for a few minutes. He concluded to try it, and hurried off after the boy.

“Now, Ned, is your chance!” exclaimed McCutcheon; “scoot for the Second Avenue Elevated, and keep your eyes open.”

Young Melton proceeded to scoot and keep his eyes open.

CHAPTER XIX.

DETECTIVE BLOWITZ stuck faithfully to his post until late in the afternoon. When Mr. Gumbridge hurried out on his way to the hotel to start for the country, he met him face to face, and said, "Good-morning."

"Good-morning," returned the gentleman, with a glance, in which there was no trace of recognition.

"Of course," said the satisfied officer, "he could not suspect my identity. Melton was pretty sharp yesterday, but I'll prove too much for him to-day."

The grave error which the really alert officer was committing was that of ignoring McCutcheon in the interesting little game going on. It was he whom he had to fear more than Melton.

"Ah," he muttered, when the messenger boy stumbled into the store, "something's up."

He strolled along the opposite side of the street, in the hope of gaining a sight of the interior; but just then so many people were passing that, much to his annoyance, they shut off his view. He was anxious to learn whether the message was for McCutcheon or Melton, though strongly of the belief that it was for the latter. Accordingly, after the bit of hesitation already

referred to, he darted after the fellow, who, being a messenger boy, was easily overtaken. The detective tapped him lightly on the shoulder, and said, —

“I want to speak to you a minute; will you step aside with me?”

He drew him where they could converse without attracting attention. The first thing he did was to hand the youngster a silver quarter.

“What’s that for?” asked the lad, with a satisfied sniff and a big grin.

“I want you to tell me whom that telegram was for that you took in the jewelry store just now, and who gave it to you.”

The urchin backed off a few steps, and looked keenly at him.

“Is that what yer guv me the money fur?”

“That’s it precisely.”

“Wall, then, I s’pose I’ll have to tell. The telegram was sent by Let-her-go-Gallagher, and was for McGinty.”

The urchin paused long enough to jab his thumb against the tip of his nose, and to twiddle his chubby fingers, when he darted up the street, just in time to escape the detective’s shoe, while people stopped and turned their heads at sight of a messenger boy running.

“Confound it!” exclaimed Blowitz, laughing in spite of himself, as he walked back on the opposite side of

Maiden Lane ; " I suppose I was served right for trying to bribe an official, but we wouldn't make much progress in the world if some of the wheels weren't greased."

Now that he was passing in front of the jewelry store, he ventured upon a glance within. Everything appeared as it was a few minutes before ; but he thought it best to make his way across, after going to the next corner, and obtain a closer view of the interior. He did so, and a discomfoting thought came to him.

" I see only one of the boys in there, and he isn't the right one. Perhaps the other is in the rear office, but I hope he hasn't given me the slip again."

The second survey failed to show him Melton, and he became more nervous than before. Confident in his disguise, he decided upon a bold step. He passed through the open door.

Before, however, he could frame the words he had decided to utter in the way of business, Mr. McCutcheon, who stood behind the counter, said with the blandest of smiles, —

" You're too late ; he waited till you chased after the messenger boy, and then skipped. I would like to oblige you, but really I don't know where he is now. You'll have to try some other get-up than that of a sporting-man or laborer, for we're getting tired of them, and would welcome a variety."

To use an expression that has been heard before, the feelings of Detective Blowitz may be better imagined than described. He no more expected such an address than he did to have a house fall on him. Quick to rally, however, he met the occasion cleverly.

"I'm obliged to you for your information, for I might have gone on for several days without dreaming I had such a brilliant youth to contend against. I will attend to the matter without delay. Good-day."

"Good-day; but wouldn't you like to buy something before you go? How would a black diamond suit your taste?"

"I have no doubt you could furnish me one if you chose, but I'm afraid your price is too high."

The natural conclusion of Detective Blowitz was that Edmund Melton, in obedience to some urgent summons, had hurried to that mysterious rendezvous, somewhere in the neighborhood of Houston Street, and that the manifest thing for him to do was to hasten after him. If he had gone anywhere else, it was idle to look for him, and the trail must be taken up again on the morrow, and another beginning made. He decided to act upon the advice of McCutcheon, and try another change of costume; but it may be questioned whether this was the wisest thing after all to do.

McCutcheon was trying to gain as much time as possible for Melton and himself. The detective would have

grown suspicious had the clerk tried to keep him in the store under some pretext; though to do this would have involved a falsehood, which the youth scorned as utterly as did Melton himself. It would take the officer a considerable while to go to his home, wherever it was, to effect a change of costume, and in that time McCutcheon expected to do some work himself. Although the hour had not yet arrived at which they usually closed, he put everything in order and started for the elevated railway.

The youth had no thought of attempting to disguise his personality. Since he had found it so easy to penetrate that of a professional, it was to be expected that the latter would be equally quick to pierce his mask. Any one seeing McCutcheon, and knowing how recently he had been ill, would have been surprised at the change. He stepped off as briskly as ever, but was compelled to put on the brakes in ascending the winding course to the elevated railway.

In the meantime, Detective Blowitz was hustling. He had no time to throw away, but tarried at home long enough to effect as complete a metamorphosis in his personal appearance as possible. This was not done by any radical means, such as padding, wearing a wig or false whiskers, that are readily detected in the sunlight by any one who cares to scrutinize closely.

He was dressed in a brown business suit, and forced

his face into an expression which changed his looks more than would be supposed. He also affected a slight lameness, and carried a cane. Thus protected, he did not get off at Ninth Street, as he first intended, but boldly descended the steps at Houston Street with the crowd, and started eastward.

As may be supposed, his eyes were put to their highest test at this time. But nothing was to be seen of Melton.

"If he is in this street, he has gone beyond where he turned about yesterday when he suspected me; but how far? That's the question I would give a good deal to have answered."

This time he took the other side of the street, walking slowly, and ever on the alert. Night was settling over the seething metropolis, and, though it was the season when many residents were out of the city, no perceptible effect was produced on this swarming section, where the tide of humanity overflows at all hours of the night and day. Detective Blowitz had not walked two blocks when, to his astonishment, he observed McCutcheon sauntering in front of him, and on the same side of the street. He recognized him at a glance, as he swung his cane almost jauntily, and with little trace of his recent weakness.

"Melton isn't far off," was the officer's conclusion; "but why the mischief aren't they together? Can it

be that this fellow has mounted guard to warn the other of my approach?

The theory seemed plausible, and his great object now was to prevent McCutcheon learning his character. With the help of the gloom, lit here and there by the street lamps, this ought not to be difficult; but Detective Blowitz was beginning to awake to the fact that two of the clerks employed by Shipman & Gumbridge were the brightest young fellows he had met in a long time, and, in pitting himself against them, it was never safe to take anything for granted.

Detective Blowitz was no more on the alert than was McCutcheon. All his mental acumen was called into play; for he strongly suspected that the officer was lurking in the vicinity, and of course would identify him the moment he came within range of his vision.

CHAPTER XX.

DROPPING twenty paces or so to the rear, Blowitz tried to accommodate his gait to that of the youth, watching every movement meanwhile. But McCutcheon seemed to be doing nothing more than merely strolling along on this warm summer night, when the interior of almost any building was uncomfortable.

Suddenly, without the least warning, the clerk wheeled about and walked at the same tardy gait toward Blowitz. It was as if he had abruptly awakened to the fact that he was going too far from home, and must return. Unfortunately, this took place at the very moment the detective was passing beneath a bright street lamp. As the best thing he could do, he continued forward; for it would not have done to show a sign of hesitation at such a crisis. But he kept his face twisted into an expression that would have deceived his own brother.

McCutcheon would have been preternaturally wise and subtle had he suspected that this man was any more to him than the scores of others who met and passed and repassed him on the street. There was nothing about him to arouse interest; and the search-

ing glance he cast at him as they met was the same he had given to others without number during the last hour.

When Blowitz judged himself to be a couple of rods from McCutcheon, he turned about and looked, half expecting him to do something which might furnish him with a pointer. Unfortunately the youth faced around at precisely the same moment, and observed the action of the detective. It was an accident on the part of the latter which might have occurred to Inspector Byrnes himself; but, all the same, it was fatal, and no one caught it more quickly than Detective Blowitz himself. He continued his walk toward the East River; but he enjoyed the peculiar sensation of knowing that while he had gone out to shadow a young man, that young man had shadowed him.

McCutcheon was keeping his promise to Melton. The instant he saw the man turn his head, he knew his business, and he devoted his whole attention to him. He followed him several blocks, until, when near the river, he turned off. Then the clerk came back, for important business awaited him.

The officer made a wide circuit, which brought him to Third Avenue, by way of Eighth Street. Having thrown the clerk off the scent, he believed the youth would look for him to come back by the same course. So he did; but he did not forget to keep guard over the other approaches. It was not his intention to be caught napping if he could prevent it.

Blowitz concluded to discard his cane, fling aside his lameness, and try another expression for his mobile countenance. That was all he could do just then ; but it must of necessity be as successful as the other methods he had tried, for they had all failed.

There seemed to be no trouble in finding the boys when there was nothing to be gained by so doing. There they were, coming along Houston Street, toward Third Avenue, and talking as though there was nothing in the whole world that specially interested them.

The officer's recent experience caused him to fight shy of the youths ; and he was quite confident they saw nothing of him when they ascended the steps of the elevated station. He had decided to make no further attempts to shadow them that night. In the first place, he was convinced nothing was to be gained by doing so ; for they would doubtless be in bed within an hour, and he would have his trouble for his pains.

Another good reason was, as he was obliged to confess to himself, he had little, if any, chance of success. The suspicions of the boys had been awakened, and they were on their guard. More than once he had felt inclined to call in some one to help him, but he held a certain pride in carrying the case through. The time had not yet arrived for him to own himself beaten by a couple of boys. He saw nothing to do except to make his way to his own home, and prepare for what the morrow should bring forth.

Mention has already been made of a certain marked aptitude native to James McCutcheon, the second clerk of Shipman & Gumbridge and the bosom friend of Edmund Melton, in the way of unraveling skeins and solving problems like these brought forward by the unaccountable vanishment of the black diamond. The time has come to show the striking manner in which he proved the possession of this knowledge, instinct, intuition, or whatever it may be called. His quickness in this direction had brought more than one expression of wonder from Melton. The latter had never held any suspicion of Archer, the young man whom he saved from drowning at the seaside; nor had he (despite the misgivings of that bumptious detective) read a line of the letter which he was writing to Blowitz when approached in the reading-room of the Columbia House; nor had he missed the black pebble stolen from his trunk. The lad was therefore astounded and incredulous when, after telling how Archer had approached him and pressed the acquaintance, McCutcheon quietly remarked, —

“I don’t doubt that he was a detective, sent down to find out what he could.”

“Well, he didn’t find out much, for it wasn’t there to be found out. He may have felt so thankful to me for the favor I was lucky enough to do him, that he came back to the city rather than prosecute me.”

“Possibly that was the fact, but it don’t sound like a professional detective.”

If Mr. Josiah Archer was ridiculed in some quarters, he undeniably received more credit than was due him from the two clerks.

Instead of accompanying his friend, McCutcheon bade him good-by on the platform at Houston Street, came down the steps again, and walked through to Broadway, where he took a down-town car. He had given Melton no hint of his errand.

Near the City Hall he disembarked, and made his way to one of the numerous drinking-saloons in that vicinity. McCutcheon had never tasted intoxicants in his life, and he did not propose to begin now. He was looking for a man.

A quick glance around the bar-room told him he was not there, and he passed to the rear, where a number were sitting around tables, drinking, smoking, and talking. The scene was anything but a pleasant one for him; but the business on which he was engaged was too serious to heed it now.

He muttered an expression of disappointment when he failed to see Micky Murphy, the young Irishman for whom he was looking. The waiter, who was quick to present himself for his order, was told to bring a couple of cigars, though McCutcheon abominated tobacco. By and by, however, a bright-faced Irishman came in

with a brisk step, shook hands with the youth, and, sitting down beside him, the two conversed in low tones for several minutes. Both were deeply in earnest. Finally McCutcheon handed the Irishman a five-dollar bill, with the remark, —

“That will pay your expenses to Sea Cliff and back.”

“It’ll do more than the same,” said Micky, “being as the fare for the round trip is but a dollar, is the same.”

“That’s all right; you are entitled to something for your pains. You know the way. (Take the Long Island Railroad” *AY*

“I know the same; I’ve been to Jamaky.” *Jamacka*

“Go straight to Sea Cliff Station, where you will get out and take the stage to the Sea Cliff House. If you choose, you can go by boat; but the Idlewild doesn’t leave until afternoon, and you will lose time. Now, Micky, there must be no mistake made; you know whom to look for: he’s at the Sea Cliff House. Go there, get a good look at his face without letting any one know your purpose, and then come back and tell me what you have learned.”

“If the Lord spares me unworthy life, the same that ye ask shall be done, and ye shall hear the news before sunset to-morrow.”

And with this pledge, and after a few more words, they separated.

CHAPTER XXI.

DETECTIVE BLOWITZ, now fully alive to the difficult task he had set out for himself, called into play all the skill of which he was master. He had been baffled in every effort to shadow Edmund Melton, and he decided upon a new line of procedure. In his home that night he did considerable subtle reasoning before evolving his plan of campaign.

"It is clear to me," he said, puffing his cigar, "that the all-important thing to do first is to find where Melton goes in Houston Street, for it was there he spent last Tuesday night; that determined, the question of his guilt or innocence is settled.

"Now, the fact that he will brave disgrace and ruin before giving up the secret, proves that he must have the most powerful motives conceivable for his silence. What it is, I don't know, but I mean to find out if it is among the possibilities.

"When I met McCutcheon this evening," he continued, getting down to what he believed was the only hope before him, "he had no suspicion of my identity, or rather that I was a detective; for I am sure he doesn't know who I am. But for that unfortunate

turn of the head at the moment he looked around, I would have solved the mystery then and there.

“But why did he turn about and come toward me, when at the moment of turning he had no thought of being watched?”

“He was on guard at that moment for Melton.

“Melton was in some house in the immediate neighborhood, and McCutcheon was watching outside, prepared to give the signal the instant he detected danger. He did give it when he learned that a detective was near. The signal was one which I did not observe, or, if I did, failed to catch its meaning.

“If I am right in my theory, and I shall test it, that is the immediate neighborhood for me to watch; and to do so successfully against two such sharp young fellows, I must have a room where I can see without being seen.”

The foregoing explains the theory he had formulated.

“Either McCutcheon or Melton must be at the store through the day. Probably both will stay there, unless some urgent call comes for one or the other, as was the case this afternoon. Consequently, the time for me to be specially watchful is late in the afternoon and evening, though I may miss it again.”

The following forenoon he made his way to the section where he had such an annoying experience, and examined it with more deliberation. He was not in

disguise ; and, though he did not expect to meet either of the young men, he took care that he was not surprised into being discovered by them.

Studying the ground with a critical eye, he fixed upon a beer saloon as the most likely place to serve his purpose, and as the most easily secured. He had done such things before, and he found little trouble in hiring the upper front room for two or three days. It was a sleeping apartment ; but the liberal price paid by the detective made the German owner eager to let him have it for weeks if he should happen to want it that long. Everything being arranged, the detective took up his quarters, plentifully supplied with cigars, while eatables and drinkables were within call at all times. Then he entered upon what promised to be a tedious and trying test of his patience.

It proved trying indeed ; for hour after hour dragged by without giving him a glimpse of either of the lads. When darkness at last settled over the city and the lamps were lighted, it was necessary to be unusually vigilant ; but he was sure that neighborhood had not been honored by a visit from Melton or McCutcheon. Near midnight the detective, hot, disgusted, and tired out, descended the stairs, and, telling the German he would be back on the morrow, went home.

The following day was Sunday, and Blowitz thought the boys would be more likely to appear there than at

any other time, inasmuch as they were free for twenty-four hours. He was at his post, therefore, quite early in the forenoon, but still without success. The first shock came to him when the afternoon was well gone. He had bowed the green blinds, so as to look up and down the street as became necessary. About a block away, toward Third Avenue, he caught sight of young Melton himself, attired neatly in his best suit, and coming slowly, as though he was out for a stroll.

“I wonder where McCutcheon is — confound it!”

Letting his eyes roam along his own side of the street, Detective Blowitz saw the identical individual almost beneath his window. Being in advance of Melton, he was evidently reconnoitering. It was plain to see that he was glancing up and down the street, and from side to side, and even at the upper windows. When the latter fact was apparent, Blowitz drew back his head.

“I believe he is the sharpest-eyed of the two, and if he discovers my eyes peeping down upon him the jig is up.”

But his coign of vantage was so excellent, that, with a little care, he was able to view the movements of the boys without any risk in return. He found them interesting enough.

While Melton was using his eyes, too, after the same manner, his principal business seemed to be to keep watch of his friend. The latter walked a short way

beyond the saloon, glanced up and down the street, and then took off his hat and fanned his face, as though suffering from the heat, when, in fact, the temperature was markedly cooler than it had been for a week.

“That’s a signal,” was the conjecture of Detective Blowitz ; “I judge it means that he sees no danger, but he cautioned his friend to wait a few minutes before making his call.”

This conclusion was based on Melton’s actions ; for, after slowing his walk for a few paces, he resumed his leisurely gait, and continued on up the street, until he passed beyond McCutcheon, who was now sauntering back again at a still slower pace.

The elder clerk peered through the open door of the saloon as he passed, stepping close enough to gain a view of the interior, and then, walking less than a hundred feet beyond, came to a full stop, and began fanning himself more vigorously than ever, so much so, indeed, that he dropped his hat.

Detective Blowitz smiled.

“That was no accident ; it was a signal ; I’ll keep my eye on him for a minute longer — confound it !”

It struck him that Melton was the most important person to watch, and he glanced across the street.

To his utter consternation, the boy was nowhere in sight ! Good cause for the exclamation indeed !

“But he can’t be far off,” was the consolation of the

watcher ; “ he must appear one of these days, and I’ll wait here till the crack of doom before he eludes me again.”

Meanwhile, he could afford to keep half an eye on Mr. McCutcheon. That young gentleman began sauntering up and down the street, much after the fashion of the preceding night, his evident business being to watch for eavesdroppers in the shape of detectives. His beat was so short, that there could remain no doubt that the house in which Ned Melton was at that moment was very near. Thus an hour passed, when McCutcheon, while just to the east of the saloon, drew out his handkerchief and flirted it peculiarly, before passing it over his face.

“ Another signal,” thought the watchful Blowitz ; “ but I can’t tell yet what it means.”

He now let McCutcheon go, and set his vision roaming up and down the other side of the street. He was resolved not to be caught napping as before.

“ Ah, there he comes, as sure as fate ! ”

The door of a respectable-looking house, almost opposite, but slightly to the eastward, suddenly opened, and Ned Melton stepped quickly into sight. It was but three steps to the pavement, along which he walked briskly in the direction of Third Avenue. At the next corner he crossed over and joined McCutcheon, and the two speedily disappeared.

“Eureka!” exclaimed the delighted detective, “I’ve hit it at last! That’s the house in which young Melton spent last Tuesday night. It now remains for me to find out why he passed it there.”

CHAPTER XXII.

It struck Detective Blowitz that no time was likely to be more favorable for pushing his investigation than the present. Melton having completed his visit, and he and his companion having departed, it was improbable that they should appear again before the morrow, and possibly not then.

Passing through the bar-room down-stairs, he went out on the street, walked to the next corner, crossed over, and, reaching the same door through which the lad had passed but a short time before, he stepped up and rang the bell. Almost instantly he heard a cautious movement as of a shutter overhead; but he did not look up, and, waiting a minute, rang the bell again. This time he heard some one descending the stairs. Then the person moved along the hall, unlocked the door, and drew it open.

Page 97 Figure
Detective Blowitz saw before him a middle-aged lady, wan, sad-looking, poorly dressed in faded mourning, with iron-gray hair, and a scared look. She held the door only partly open, and her hands trembled.

"Good-afternoon," said the caller, politely lifting his hat. "Will you please ask Mr. Melton to step to the door a moment?"

In a weak, tremulous voice she answered, —

“ Mr. Melton isn't here, sir.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed the gentleman, snatching out his watch and looking at it ; “ why did he tell me to meet him here at six, when it lacks a few minutes only of six ? Maybe he hasn't arrived yet ? ”

“ We don't expect him.”

“ Ah, then he has come and gone ? ”

The lady hesitated about replying, and then said, —

“ You have made a mistake, sir,” and, without another word, closed the door in his face.

But at the moment of doing so, the detective heard again the cautious stirring of a shutter overhead. This time he looked up, and was in time to catch a glimpse of a white, terrified countenance that was immediately withdrawn, as if fearful of being discovered. Realizing, as he had many times before, that the detective's pursuit of knowledge is generally attended with difficulties, Blowitz moved down the street, determined not to give up his surveillance of the house for a while to come.

“ I have learned that a pale, sad woman, and another individual, with a still whiter countenance, are inside. I think the second person is a male, though whether a man or a boy I am not sure. There may be a dozen others in there, and I might have gotten myself in a hornets' nest before suspecting it.”

“Can it be that that house holds the secret of the stolen diamond? What a record it would make if the dwellings, even in a single block, could tell all that has taken place within their walls!”

It would hardly do to re-enter the saloon, since it was in such plain sight that the eyes that were watching him would be sure to read his purpose. He recalled that during his wearisome waiting, both on that day and the day before, he had seen an elderly gentleman enter and come out of it several times. He had plenty of opportunity to observe proceedings, and he noted all this. He recalled, too, that the man looked like a doctor, and he formed the conclusion that some one within was seriously ill.

Could it be that the white face of which he had caught a glimpse belonged to the patient, whose fright had led him to drag himself for a moment to the window?

“It is quite safe to conclude that whatever parties are in the house, they have a patient among them, else why the physician’s visit? Being shut off at present from making the acquaintance of the invalid, I will try the doctor, and see what can be pumped out of him.”

Another long waiting followed; but the physician appeared just before nightfall, and remained in the house some fifteen or twenty minutes. He was on foot, and, when he came out, it was easy for Detective Blowitz to

follow him to his office on Fourteenth Street. He made no stops on the way; and, a few minutes after his entrance, the officer rang the bell, and inquired for Dr. Meredith, whose name, as was to be expected, was prominently displayed at the front window. The moment he was ushered into the medical man's office, the caller recognized him as the visitor at the house he had been watching so long.

Detective Blowitz, well aware how jealously the true physician guards the secrets of his patients, knew better than to drive straight at the subject in his mind. He made complaint of a touch of rheumatism, in which the doctor showed the usual professional interest, and made enough inquiries to satisfy himself before writing a prescription.

The caller paid the fee, and rose to go, when he said, as though the thought had just come to him, —

“I think I noticed you on Houston Street this afternoon.”

“Very probably,” replied the physician with a smile, “for I was there; I have a number of patients in that neighborhood.”

“I think this was at No. — that I saw you enter.”

“Yes, I was there,” replied the medical gentleman, with a slight nod, as if on his guard; “are you acquainted with the occupants?”

“Well, no, hardly that; but a friend of mine, a

wealthy employer, has a couple of young men who have been visiting that place for some time past, and he is desirous of knowing what the special attraction is. He has a fatherly interest in his employees, and feels that he has a right to know."

"Has he inquired of them?"

Detective Blowitz was unwilling to utter a downright untruth, but he saw that the man before him was on the defensive. Despite the care with which the officer approached the subject, the doctor had taken the alarm.

"He has not inquired of them directly, but one of his friends has, and without success."

"Was this friend authorized to make such inquiry?"

"Most certainly."

"And the gentlemen refused to answer him?"

"They did."

"And pray what is your interest in the matter?"

"He wishes me to learn the truth for him."

"If the lads refuse you, why not go to the house and make inquiry there?"

"Will they give it?"

"I cannot answer; have you tried?"

The doctor was firing the shots at his caller as fast as the latter could launch them at him.

"I have."

"And with what success?"

"None at all; they will give no information."

"Then I do not know who can," remarked the physician, compressing his thin lips and looking very stern.

"I am fully aware of the sacredness with which a physician holds the secrets of his patients," said the detective; "but I was hopeful that I would not be expecting you to do anything unprofessional if I asked you the name of your patient and what is his special malady."

"You tell me you know a physician's duty toward his patients, and yet your questions prove you do not; or, if you do, you choose to ignore them. You have asked me to betray a confidence, for which I would despise myself if I complied. I presume your errand here had more to do with that than with rheumatism."

Ignoring this thrust, Detective Blowitz said, —

"I beg pardon for my blunder; but, if you knew how much is at stake in this matter, you would excuse my solicitude."

"I have nothing to do with that, sir; but it strikes me that if the employer of the young gentlemen you have spoken of has a legitimate right to pry into their personal affairs, he can readily learn the truth about them. Good-day, sir."

"It's lucky I am not thin-skinned," chuckled Blowitz, as he strolled up toward Broadway; "for the snubbings and defeats that I've run against within a week are enough to blanch the cheek of a book-agent. I

begin to feel like a poor orphan alone in New York, without a friend to help him. The next thing for me to do, I suppose, is to trump up some charge against that house, and get a search-warrant that will compel its occupants to show up."

But he disliked that step, and was not ready to take it until other means were exhausted. One was to go to Edmund Melton, and tell him it was known where he went on that fateful Tuesday night, and then, if he still refused to open his mouth, inform him that the house would be raided and forced to give up its secret.

"But that may put him on his guard," reflected the detective; "and it won't do to give him and McCutcheon more rope than can be helped."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE were two genuine detectives, using all the skill of which they were possessed, trying to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the black diamond from the safe of Shipman & Gumbridge, in Maiden Lane. One was Erastus Blowitz, and the other James McCutcheon. One was a veteran of many years' experience, and the other a boy, not twenty years old; and fate ordered that it should fall to the latter to strike the clew which baffled every effort of the former.

When McCutcheon had acquired all the facts, he set to work with that natural aptitude of which I have spoken. Like a true detective, he kept what he was doing from his most intimate friend, Melton, around whom the coils seemed to be infolding themselves.

It having been established beyond denial that some one had visited the store in Maiden Lane between midnight and daybreak (so that the burglary was really effected in the early hours of Wednesday morning), he considered it equally certain that the visitor must have been seen by one or more persons. Even at that late hour there were people passing through Maiden Lane, to say nothing of the policemen on their regular beat.

The latter had been questioned without result, both by Blowitz and McCutcheon.

It followed, therefore, that somewhere there were one or more persons who could solve the mystery; but by what earthly means could those persons be found? The natural recourse of advertising in the daily papers suggested itself; but that involved a publicity that the youth dreaded. It would be sure to reach the ears of Colonel Bainbridge, Melton's guardian, and that impulsive gentleman would be certain to make things unpleasant for his nephew, not to mention others concerned. The papers must not be appealed to except as a last resort.

The conclusion reached by the youth was to begin his investigations at the drinking-saloons in the neighborhood. Those were the places that kept late hours; and the one conducted by Micky Murphy, in Nassau Street, was almost within sight of the store. Thither, therefore, the youthful detective went. His first essay brought a success that fairly took away his breath. Micky was open that night until after two o'clock in the morning, his usual custom being to close at midnight. After beating about the bush, McCutcheon said, —

“The store had a visitor Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning, and there is a dispute among the clerks and Mr. Gumbridge as to who it was. I thought

possibly that you might have had some one in here at the time who saw our caller, and who could describe him. Can you remember who were with you between twelve and one o'clock?"

The Irishman was leaning over one end of the bar and talking to the youth, leaving his own boy to wait on customers. When the last question was asked him, he grinned significantly, and said in an undertone, —

"Come into the back room beyond for a few minutes."

McCutcheon followed him, his heart beating fast with a new and thrilling hope. Sitting down at a table where they were out of hearing, Micky asked, with the same grin on his good-looking face, —

"What time of night was that?"

"Between twelve and one o'clock; in fact, between half-past twelve and one."

Then came the startling declaration, —

"It was me ownself, Micky Murphy, that saw the mon!" *man*

"What!" gasped McCutcheon, starting from his seat; "are you speaking the truth?"

"That's what Micky Murphy always does, thanks to the good training he resaved from his blissed mither."

"Tell me how it was, please."

"Well," began the Irishman, a flush overspreading his rosy countenance, "I was out on a little bat wid the boys that night, whin I ought to have been here

'tinding to bus'ness like a gintleman; but I wasn't all the same: and be the same token, I was that late in git-ting back that it was nigh one o'clock whin I come through Maiden Lane, walkin' ^gas sthraight as I knowed how, so as not to attract the eye of the cops, — and I will own that it wasn't the ^{ea}aisiest job of me life, — whin, jist as I was passing your place beyant, I obsarved a gintleman come out and lock the door behint him."

"Did you have a look at him?"

"Whisht, now, don't ye recall the big lamp that's in front of your place? He turned about as I was just opposite the same. At first I was thinking there was two of him; but that was owing to the good time I had had wid the boys. He looked ^{ee}kaanly at me; and be the same token, I took a kaan glimpse at him."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Many's the time. I don't know his name, but I've obsarved him in your place whin I was ^epromenadin' past, and he was behint the counter as if he was the boss of the shop."

McCutcheon was barely able to falter, —

"Describe him."

"A middle-aged gintleman, well dressed, wid side whiskers" —

"Enough; you are describing Mr. Gumbridge," interrupted the youth, retaining his self-control by a strong

effort. "Meet me at —— saloon, near the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, to-night at ten o'clock."

McCutcheon wanted time to think of several matters that were brought up by the astounding words of the Irishman. He thought it best to meet him in another place, since Micky would be less likely to be disturbed by acquaintances. Besides, McCutcheon desired to be certain that no detective was shadowing him at the time of the interview. He had noticed that Melton was the special object of such surveillance; but there was no saying when another officer might be put on his track, or when the one now at the business should transfer his attentions to him.

It was in the afternoon that he had this talk with the Irishman. He crossed the street to the store, which was in charge of Melton, and who had no thought of the errand that had kept McCutcheon out for half an hour. He noticed that the latter was thoughtful, as though something was on his mind (and he naturally believed he knew its nature), so he did not break in upon his reveries, except when business made it necessary.

The first overwhelming fact that confronted the youth was that the Irishman, so far as he went, had described Mr. Gumbridge himself. McCutcheon knew nothing of the surmises of his employer and the detective in that direction; but the thought of somnambulism inevitably

came to him. An instinct, however, which he could not explain, whispered to him that Micky Murphy was mistaken; the visitor whom he saw could not have been Mr. Gumbridge. Had he left the Astor House in a somnambulistic state, his actions must have attracted the notice of some of the observant *attachés*; and the gentleman himself would have investigated the possibility of such a thing (as, indeed, he had done).

Another fact was not to be forgotten: the Irishman, by his own acknowledgment, was not in a condition to judge things with accuracy at the time he believed he saw Mr. Gumbridge. An intoxicated man sees many queer things, many of which exist only in his imagination; and what more likely than that he erred on the night of the robbery?

But McCutcheon would have been derelict beyond conception if, for the reasons named, he had dismissed from further investigation what might prove to be an invaluable clew. It was for that reason that he asked Micky Murphy to meet him at another saloon, for a further discussion of the matter. Nothing would have been easier than for him to come to the store, or for McCutcheon to go to his place, without waiting for the time named. But the watchful detective would be sure to notice anything of that nature; and the youth did not wish him to take the Irishman in hand until he was through with him.

The reader has already learned what took place at the meeting appointed, whither Micky Murphy went a little late. Despite the partial description given by him, McCutcheon was not convinced. He therefore engaged Micky to go to Sea Cliff and see Mr. Gumbridge face to face. The man was certain he could identify him; and, before taking a single step farther along the misty vista opening before him, the youth was resolved that no such fatal mistake should be made, if in his power to prevent it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LESS spirited man than Erastus Blowitz might have given up the fight after his snub by Dr. Meredith; but the true detective does not yield so long as he has an inch of ground to stand on: Blowitz was beginning to enjoy it.

“It looks as if fate had set out to turn me back from every avenue I attempt to enter; but I must have a good many more turnings back before I throw up the sponge.”

On the day succeeding his call on the physician, he was at his old station, over the German saloon-keeper's place. This time the detective had gotten himself up to resemble a medical gentleman. True, this required little, if any, change of apparel, since physicians closely resemble the average man in looks, manner, and style of dress; but Blowitz, in addition to the indefinable something which marks the majority of those belonging to the medical profession, carried with him a little hand-bag, similar to that in which a surgeon keeps his instruments. It may be said that nature rendered it easy for him to assume the part he had in mind. The changes were mostly of a facial character, since he did

not wish to be too readily detected. His hair was whitened, and the mustache and goatee, stuck in place, were carefully grizzled.

Time did not hang so heavily on his hands as during his preceding vigils. He had learned considerable, and it was ordered that he should take the most important step of all that afternoon. His first object now was to study the habits of those who entered and left the mysterious building, so far as such a thing could be done from his station. It was not until afternoon that he settled himself for a steady and careful scrutiny of his field of vision.

The first familiar figure that came into view was that of the energetic, wide-awake Dr. Meredith. He had no fear of detectives or watchers, for he had nothing to conceal. He walked straight to his destination, rang the bell, entered, and was present no more than ten minutes, when he came out and soon passed from view in the direction of Third Avenue. Nothing was to be gained by following him, and the watcher gave him no further thought.

He had been out of sight less than half an hour when the pale-faced woman who stopped the detective on the threshold came out. She was plainly clad in mourning, and carried a basket on her arm.

"Probably means to make some purchases," was the conclusion of Detective Blowitz; "but I may as well make sure of it."

Consequently the woman was shadowed from the time of her appearance until she re-entered her home. The interval was less than half an hour, her movements and manner showing her anxiety to return without delay. She went to two or three stores, buying tea at one place, sugar at another, and some trifling articles at a third.

Then she stopped at a drug-store, and had a prescription filled, after which she passed along Houston Street to her residence. This was uneventful enough; but the detective received one good start while shadowing her. At the moment of crossing Third Avenue he observed Ned Melton descending the steps of the elevated railway station. The young man had no companion, and had evidently left McCutcheon in charge of the store during his absence.

The officer managed to steal a glance or two at the lad while keeping track of the woman's movements. Any one who has ever attempted it knows how difficult it is to "shadow" another for any length of time without being suspected. The task is infinitely greater when the effort is to "pipe" two persons going in opposite directions. It is self-evident that it cannot be done, except to a trifling extent. But the woman had entered the store on the corner of Bleecker Street, and remained within long enough for Blowitz to take a look or two at the youth, and to note that he was heading

toward the house which he had already visited several times.

The officer did not want to meet Ned Melton face to face; for nothing was to be made by doing so, and he might lose a great deal. His own change of appearance was not sufficient, as he feared, to deceive the lad when he was on his guard. Ordinarily it would do so, and might in the present instance; but the detective was taking no unnecessary chances. Accordingly, when the woman started homeward, he not only remained well to the rear, but kept on the other side of the street, not entering the saloon until some minutes after she had passed from sight in her own home.

Detective Blowitz never went into the lower room, in which there were always a number of loungers, without casting one searching glance for suspicious characters. It was not a desirable thing to be shadowed while shadowing another, as he had been taught more than once by experience. He saw nothing to disturb him, and was soon back at his old perch, as alert, vigilant, and eager as ever. The weather had become warm again, and his situation was unpleasant to a degree. Not a breath of air was stirring. The German people seemed oblivious of such a luxury as ventilation, and all the heat in the building appeared to be concentrated in the room at whose window he sat in a chair, smoking until all enjoyment of the weed was lost. But, with

the shutters bowed in front of his face, he tipped forward in his chair, and allowed nothing to elude his vision.

It was a long while after the return of the woman that the watcher observed a movement of the shutters from which he had seen the white face peering down upon him. He could see nothing further, the blinds being turned so as to prevent it; but it followed, of course, that some person was manipulating them.

“He is seeking to find out whether the coast is clear for Melton to come out.”

The stir of the blinds lasted several minutes, previous to which Blowitz had satisfied himself that the lad was alone in his visit to the section. McCutcheon, no doubt, was at the store in Maiden Lane, and would stay there until closing time. In fact, it was already late enough to justify him in shutting up shop.

The watcher soon had proof that he was right in his supposition. Melton, who must have been waiting in the hall below, became satisfied he had nothing to fear. The door was quickly opened and closed, and he stepped briskly off toward the avenue. Blowitz noticed his furtive glances up and down and across the street, and understood their cause.

“I don’t consider it worth while to dog you again, my son; so go in peace.”

The observant watcher had noticed that Dr. Mere-

dith's "shingle" gave his evening office hours as from seven to nine. Consequently, unless the circumstances were exceptional, he was always to be found at home during the interval named.

"I hope he will stay there this evening, or, at least, keep out of this neighborhood. I don't want him interfering with me."

The sultry August afternoon was drawing to a close when Detective Blowitz, with his instrument-case in hand, emerged from the saloon, and started at a brisk walk toward the avenue. Any one casting a glance at him would have set him down as a physician or surgeon that had just made a professional call upon the family of the German. During the walk, Detective Blowitz did the best he knew how to work himself into his assumed character. Arriving at the avenue, he did not turn down it, but crossed the street, and came directly back over the route just passed, with the exception that he took the other side of the street.

When opposite the dwelling he had studied for so many hours in vain, he promptly stepped up and rang the bell. Instantly his vigilant ear caught the slight rustling of the shutters overhead, and he knew he was undergoing another scrutiny. Evidently it was satisfactory; for a few minutes later a step sounded in the hall, and the door was partly opened by the same woman he had seen on his former visit.

“ Good-day, madam,” he said pleasantly, stepping forward, as if his time was precious ; “ I couldn’t meet Dr. Meredith in time to hold a consultation with him, so I concluded to run down and take a look at our friend, and then report to the doctor. How does he seem this evening ? ”

“ You’re the other doctor, are you ? ” asked the woman, drawing the door farther inward, but still a little bewildered in manner.

“ Didn’t he tell you about Dr. Hannibal ? Excuse me, for I have other important engagements to look after.”

“ I didn’t mean to keep you waiting, but we have to be careful ; come in.”

And “ Dr. Hannibal ” entered the house that had baffled him so long.

CHAPTER XXV.

DETECTIVE BLOWITZ, in the character of "Doctor Hannibal," calling by request of the regular physician, stepped into the narrow hall of the house, whose threshold he had never been permitted to cross until now, and waited for the lady to show him the way.

"Up-stairs," she said, pausing for him to precede her. He skipped nimbly up, and paused at the head of the steps for her to direct him farther.

She now brushed past him, took the lead, and, with hushed footfall and decreasing pace, passed to the door of the front room, which she noiselessly opened, and looked round for him to enter. He was directly behind her, and stepped within.

On a bed near the front windows lay a young man, whose glassy eyes and pallid, shrunken features told so observant a gentleman as the detective, with his little medical knowledge, that he was stricken with some fatal ailment, and had but a short time to live. The visitor did not shrink from the peculiar and trying task upon which he had entered. He removed his gloves, placed his instrument-case on the little table, almost covered with phials, tumblers, and the various para-

phernalia of the sick-room, and softly approached the bedside.

The woman, who was watching him closely, placed a chair for him, on which, with a gentle "Thank you," he sat down. Then assuming a cheerfulness which the wise physician always carries into the sick-room, he took the wasted hand, applied his forefinger to the pulse, and kindly asked, —

"How do you feel this evening?"

"Pretty bad, doctor; but I think I'm a little better," replied the young man in a husky voice, fixing his eyes longingly on the face bending over him, as if he would read the thoughts there.

"I hope so," returned the caller, passing his hand over the clammy forehead, and tenderly brushing away the dark matted hair; "let us believe you will pull through."

"Do you think I will, doctor?" was asked in the same husky voice, and accompanied by the same yearning look.

"It will do a good deal towards it if you keep up a brave heart, my lad."

"No one could be braver than Washington," said the sad-eyed mother, standing at the head of the bed, and trying to keep back the tears.

"I don't doubt it. Doctor Meredith says the same thing; he has grown quite fond of Washing — what did he tell me his other name is?"

"Fulmer — Washington Fulmer."

"Ay, yes; it had slipped my mind."

The reader will recall that Ned Melton, in one of his conversations with Detective Archer, referred to Wash Fulmer.

"You understand, doctor, that the name is to be given to nobody, and nothing is to be said about your visit to any one except Dr. Meredith."

"It isn't necessary to remind me of that, my good lady," said the visitor with a kindly, reproving smile; "it is all right, and you may give yourself no concern on that score. How long has your son been in this condition?"

"He came home a little more than two weeks ago not feeling well. He wanted to give himself up — that is — you understand," she said, with some confusion.

"Of course, of course," replied the doctor, nodding sympathetically, as he looked round in her face.

"But I persuaded him to wait until he got well, poor boy; and instead of getting better, he has been growing worse."

At this point the mother, overcome by her feelings, put her handkerchief to her eyes and silently wept.

It would be unjust to Detective Blowitz to say he was not touched by the scene, so full of human pathos. No man could look upon the youth, who had lately been a fine, manly fellow, but was now smitten down

by mortal illness, and see the grief of the parent without being moved.

The officer had resolved at the moment he took his place by the bedside that, whatever might be the issue of this strange move on his part, he would never be the means of bringing any additional sorrow to this household. He believed these two, with the exception perhaps of a servant, and there was no certainty of that, since none had as yet shown herself, were the only occupants of the house. Neither mercy nor justice called for any steps on his part that might deepen the shadow already resting across the threshold. Even though his profession was an unfeeling one, in which sentimentality is the last element to play a part, he had a heart, and it was stirred by suffering and distress. Still he had succeeded in entering this home, and he did not intend to surrender any advantage that might be gained by a considerable use of the means thus placed in his hands.

He not only tested the pulse, and passed his palm over the forehead of the patient, but looked at his tongue, and asked him numerous questions about his peculiar symptoms. The conclusion reached by the pretended physician was that the young man was dying with what is properly known as "galloping consumption," one strange phase of which is that the patient often strenuously believes he is on the road to recovery,

when he is actually at death's door. He told of his night-sweats, his coughing, and hemorrhages, but insisted that he was stronger than he had been for a week; and with a flickering glow of triumph spoke of his rising up in bed, so as to look down in the street, when he heard the ring of the bell.

"Well, now, that is good!" exclaimed the gentleman, with a beaming face, which did the poor boy more good than any cunning mixture of drugs could do; "but don't presume on your strength: it is better to remain in bed until Dr. Meredith advises you to try sitting up."

"He told him he must not think of doing so," remarked the mother, wiping her eyes and speaking more composedly, "and I urged him not to; but every ring of the door-bell startles him: you understand how it is, doctor."

"Certainly; but I am sure he has nothing to fear; no one can want to disturb a sick boy."

"I don't know about that," she replied significantly. "Mr. Melton and McCutcheon both told us that some one had tried to follow them when they came here, and Edmund never comes in until he is sure the way is clear; it would break his heart if he was the means of bringing the officers."

Here was a confirmation of what had been clearly hinted before; this young man, certainly less than

twenty years of age, and with but a few more days to live, had committed some crime which caused him to be in mortal fear of the law.

What was it? (Was it the theft of the black diamond? It seemed incredible, in view of his physical condition; but the detective probed a little farther, to assure himself.

“How long has your son been confined to his room?”

“Ever since he came home, a fortnight ago last Saturday.”

“And during that time he has not been out of the house?”

“Mercy, no! he has never left his room at all.”

This statement, if true, — and what reason could there be for doubting it? — established another *alibi*. Clearly Wash Fulmer was not the one who, a week before, had taken the black diamond from the safe of Shipman & Gumbridge. But was he not an accomplice? Did it not begin to look as if Ned Melton, and possibly James McCutcheon, had formed some extraordinary partnership with this young man, who, if he chose, could unravel the whole mystery? These questions which Blowitz asked himself indicated the thoughts in his mind. But the present was no time to indulge in them; that could be done afterward. The occasion must be used to push farther toward the truth.

“Mr. Melton and McCutcheon, of whom I have

heard nothing but good things, do not think their visits here are known?"

"Mr. Melton told us to-day he was sure they were not, and he promised us to be very careful; you understand that it would kill Washington if the officers should come."

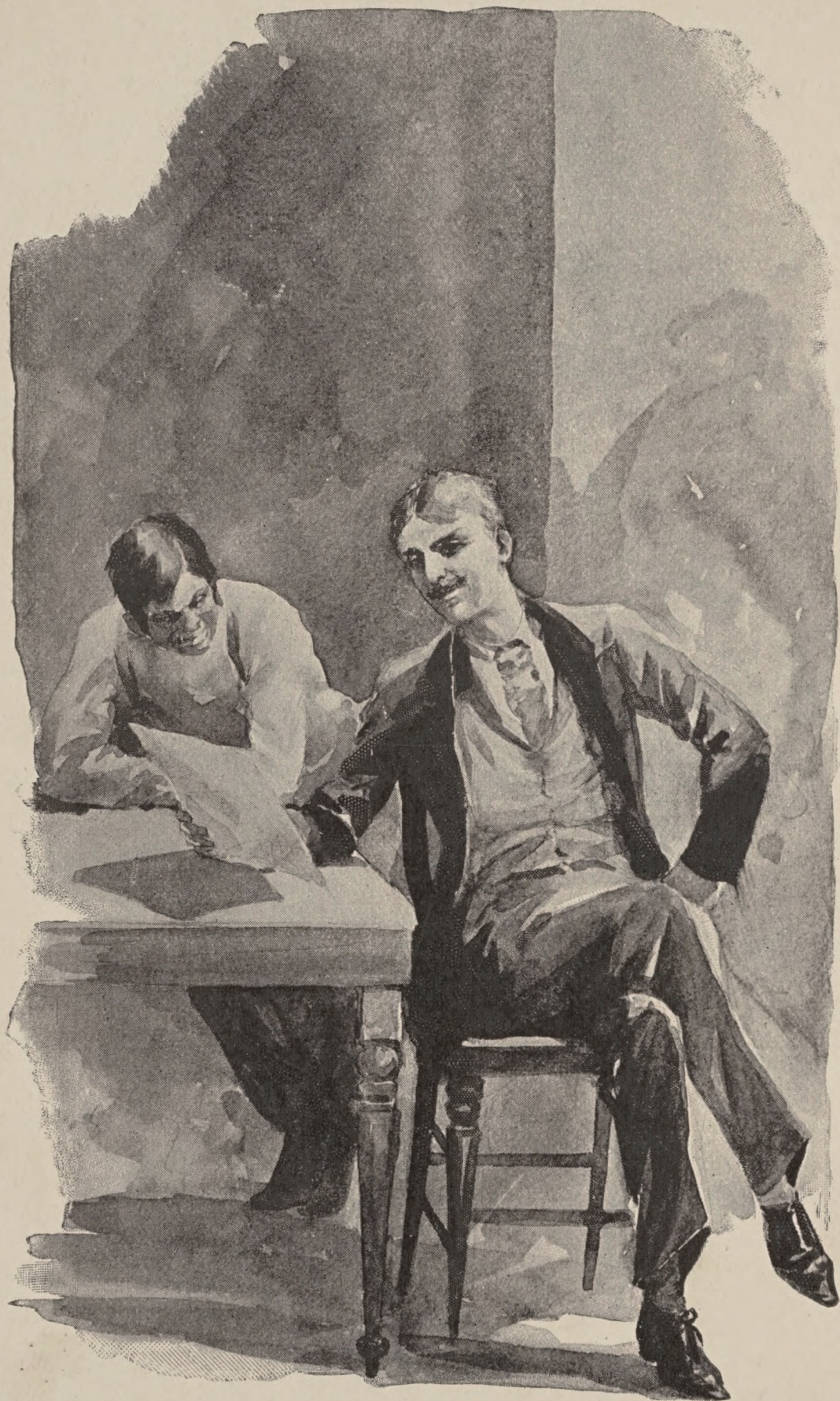
"I beg you to give yourself no uneasiness on that score. May I ask whether Mr. Melton remained here all night last Tuesday" —

At that moment the door-bell rang. The sick lad gave a start and attempted to rise; but the doctor laid his hand on his shoulder, and said gently, —

"Stay where you are; it's all right."

Meanwhile the mother had stepped to the window and looked out. She took one cautious but searching glance, and then, turning about, looked at the visitor with a strange expression, and said, —

"It's Dr. Meredith."



James McCutcheon sat at the table studying the excellent drawing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"CONFOUND it! what brings him here?" thought Detective Blowitz, who, however, was quick to rise to the emergency.

"Are you sure it isn't an officer?" asked the terrified patient, with his dark eyes fixed on his mother.

"Certainly; don't I know the doctor, dear?"

She started to go down-stairs to admit him, when Blowitz interposed.

"One moment, please allow me."

She looked inquiringly at the gentleman, who explained, —

"I wish to have a few words with him alone."

This sounded reasonable enough, and she took the chair he had just vacated by the head of the bed.

On his way down-stairs, Blowitz slipped the empty instrument-case under his arm, and concealed it as best he could, though with poor success. Then he promptly opened the door.

Dr. Meredith showed his surprise at seeing him, and looked inquiringly in his face.

"I didn't expect to meet you here, sir," he said brusquely.

"Nor did I expect to meet you," replied the detective in a disguised voice; for he saw, despite the words of the physician, that he did not associate him with the man that called on him some time before to procure a prescription for the rheumatism that didn't trouble him; "but no harm has been done—a trifling mistake—that is all."

And without pausing for further words, Blowitz passed out of the door, and moved hurriedly in the direction of Third Avenue. He was in no personal fear, but he concluded there was no need of lingering in that neighborhood.

Dr. Meredith stood a moment aghast at the effrontery of the man. Then, with a sniff of indignation, he slowly ascended the stairs and made his way toward the sick-room, where Mrs. Fulmer stood by the open door awaiting him.

"Who was that man?" he asked, stopping in the short hall outside, and addressing the mother.

"Why, Dr. Hannibal; he said you sent him, as he was late getting to your office."

"The scoundrel! he"—

But the physician was quick-witted. He saw the look of terror that flashed into the face of the woman, and he knew his words had been heard by the sick youth. If he should express his thoughts, the shock was likely to be fatal to him. He switched off with inimitable cleverness.

“What did you say his name was?”

“Dr. Hannibal.”

“Oh, ho! my old friend,” he responded, with a genial laugh, walking into the room, and taking the seat that had been vacated but a few minutes before by the bogus physician; “why didn’t you speak plainer? Isn’t that funny, now?”

“What’s that?” asked the boy, deeply interested.

“That I didn’t recognize him; but it was dark in the hall, and I hadn’t a good look in his face. You know the light was turned low.”

He saw that mother and son were still bewildered by the occurrence, and he didn’t hesitate to prevaricate to a shocking degree.

“Hannibal is one of the greatest wags that ever lived; was always playing jokes in college: the scamp concealed his face on purpose to perpetrate a trick on me. He could have got to my office in time if he wasn’t so plaguey lazy; he knew I would score him at the first chance, and he dodged me.”

“But won’t you see him?”

“The sly rogue will slip round to my office like enough, and be waiting there for me when I go back, with a gentle reproof on his lips because I am late. I first thought he was some rival like Dr. Hannibal, who was sneaking in to my patient, as he has tried to do more than once before, the scoundrel! but it’s all

right—it's all right; or rather, I will soon make it so."

"I supposed from what he said," gently interposed the mother, "that he was to consult with you."

"Of course; and can't we do that at my office much better than here? He made an examination of Washington, didn't he?"

"Yes; a very thorough one."

"What did he say?"

"He was hopeful, and told him he must follow your directions as closely as he could."

"Sensible man!" exclaimed Dr. Meredith with a laugh; "he wouldn't dare say anything else. I'm glad he spoke encouragingly to you."

I have said Dr. Meredith laughed and appeared cheerful; but the good fellow assumed it all for the sake of his patient and the mother. Nevertheless, he was madder than he had been in years. The Dr. Hannibal he named was a myth. He had caught sight of the instrument-case under the arm of the visitor, and he had learned of the medical examination made by him. His conclusion was that the caller was another physician who was seeking in this underhand manner to steal his patients from him. His conduct, indeed, was so unprofessional that he determined to find out who he was, and make sure that he was rigorously disciplined by the Medical Board; that is, if he should prove to be a "regular."

Needless to say, however, that all the investigations he set on foot ended in naught. He could get no trace of "Dr. Hannibal," who failed to present himself again at the home of the Fulmers. Dr. Meredith concluded that the fellow had been scared off, and would not show himself again in that neighborhood. The call of the physician during his own office-hours, must have been prompted by some unusual cause. Such was the fact. At his visit in the afternoon he had detected most significant symptoms in his patient. Not quite sure what they meant, he knew the truth would become manifest within a few hours at the most; and it was to learn that truth that he made this unexpected visit.

The poor fellow on the couch saw nothing but hopefulness in the pleasing face bending over him, for the gentleman had learned, long before, how to counterfeit that emotion; but when he rose to go he gave the mother a glance which she understood as a notice that he wished to speak to her alone. She followed him, as was her custom, to let him out of the door; and the two paused a few minutes in the lower hall.

"Well, Doctor, what is it?" she asked, nerving herself for the answer she dreaded to hear.

"Have you had any hope for the last week, my dear Mrs. Fulmer, that your boy would get well?"

"I knew he was very ill," she replied in a tremulous

undertone ; “ but he was so hopeful himself that I grew to share it with him.”

The physician gravely shook his head, and whispered, —

“ Dismiss it.”

“ Then there is no hope, Doctor ? ”

“ You must bear up for his sake ; don’t let him see that you know that he has but a few more days to live ” —

“ O Doctor, don’t ! ” pleaded the mother.

She would have shed tears, but the fountains of grief were dry, and she rallied by a supreme effort.

“ How long do you think he will last ? ”

“ I cannot say, but it is short at the most — only a few days, as I said just now.”

“ Will it be a week ? ”

“ Possibly ; but I don’t think so : he’s liable to go at any moment. I can do no more for him ; he is close to death’s door.”

With a few sympathetic words the medical gentleman bade her good-night and left.

Meanwhile, Detective Blowitz awoke to a most uncomfortable fact ; while he was playing the *rôle* of a physician, he found he was in actual need of one himself. He was attacked with a peculiar though faint dizziness while at the house in Houston Street. He thought nothing of it, but it returned again while

ascending the steps of the Elevated; and had he not caught the guard, he would have fallen. As it was, several looked at him as though they thought him intoxicated.

His head rang and buzzed all the way home. But, with his iron will, he forced himself to walk the short distance necessary to reach his house. There he ordered his servant to send at once for his regular physician. He came, examined, prescribed, and told his patient that he was in for a long attack of fever. So it proved; and for a full week the great Detective Blowitz was as helpless as an infant a few weeks old. Then he began rapidly to regain health and strength.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MATTERS went unsatisfactorily in the meanwhile with young McCutcheon. It will be recalled that he had sent Micky Murphy to Sea Cliff, L.I., to learn of a surety whether the gentleman whom he was to see there was the one that he had observed leave the store of Shipman & Gumbridge at the time the theft of the black diamond was known to have taken place.

The appointment was made for ten o'clock the succeeding night, at the saloon where the two held their last interview. McCutcheon, as may be supposed, was present on time, having first assured himself that no detective was shadowing him; but the party of the second part did not show up. The youth waited until after eleven, and then went home, disappointed and disturbed.

He had had misgivings about the Irishman. Aside from the fact that he was not himself on that night, there was a doubt in the mind of the youth as to his truthfulness. It may have been that Micky scented a prospective reward, for he had already hinted at something of the kind; and if this should prove true, he was likely to lead the youth on a wild-goose chase. Mc-

Cutcheon reappeared Monday evening at the saloon, trying to persuade himself that his man might have mistaken the night set for their meeting; but he again failed to put in an appearance.

Annoyed and puzzled more than he was willing to admit, McCutcheon made his way to Murphy's saloon, having kept a watch for him in vain through the day. The young man in charge assured the inquirer that Mr. Murphy had not been seen since he left, and he was beginning to wonder what had become of him.

"It would be strange if some accident has befallen him," reflected the disturbed McCutcheon; "can it be that any one is interested in keeping him away? Perhaps the guilty man has scented danger, and has arranged it with him, so that he shall remain absent until it is too late; but it is hard to see how that can be."

McCutcheon still kept his own counsel. He refrained from giving Melton a hint of what he was doing, and warned him to be as careful as ever in his visits to Houston Street. As the time passed, they noted that the "shadow" was removed; that is, so far as they could ascertain.

"It may be he has assumed some guise which deceives us," suggested Melton.

"I doubt it; I have been on the watch for anything of that kind, and I don't believe he could have escaped me. Have you seen any one acting suspiciously?"

"No; and you can be sure I have kept my eyes about me. Mrs. Fulmer says she has observed no one in the neighborhood of the house that appeared to be watching it."

"That might have been, without her detecting it."

The lady, by the request of Dr. Meredith, refrained from telling anything about the call of Dr. Hannibal; not, as has been shown, that he had any fear, but through a wish to avoid worrying the youth unnecessarily.

It was well for their peace of mind that she did so; for McCutcheon would have been quick to read the real meaning of the visit.

McCutcheon was meditating a visit to Sea Cliff, in search of the missing Murphy, but refrained, from a belief that he would appear at any hour of the day; besides which, he could not believe he was still at that well-known resort. He had gone to some other place, and most probably was in hiding somewhere. He dropped into his saloon several times a day, until Melton bantered him on forming bad habits, and expressed some curiosity to know the cause of his action.

"I am looking for a certain person who ought to be there," said his friend. "But you must ask me no further particulars."

Mr. McFarlane called one day to inquire whether anything had been learned of the missing diamond.

McCutcheon, while answering in the negative, studied him closely, and came to the conclusion that the young man was innocent of all complicity in the theft. He had hardly suspected it; but, truth to tell, he didn't know whom to suspect, and was looking for a clew wherever it might be found. He had inquired in other directions for some one who, happening to pass the store on the night of the theft, had seen the party within; but he met with no success.

“Micky Murphy is the only person who can tell me,” he concluded, “provided he tells a true story; but where in the name of the seven wonders can he be all this time?”

Melton's visits to Wash Fulmer became more frequent as he saw the end approaching. McCutcheon accompanied him at times, and once or twice went alone. As the death of the poor fellow drew nearer, his visitors relaxed the caution they had shown at first in approaching the place.

So long as there was hope that young Fulmer would get well, they neglected no care, and it has been shown with what skill they conducted themselves; but when the end was not only inevitable, but close at hand, the necessity for such vigilance ceased. At his death it would be gone altogether. So it came about that the time speedily arrived when they discarded all precaution, and went and came openly, taking turns in looking

after the store. Had Detective Blowitz been on deck, his task would have been easy; but he had accomplished all that was to be done in that line, besides which, as will be remembered, he was in the hands of a physician, and was in such a bodily state that all the black and white diamonds in the world possessed no interest for him.

One evening, puzzled, disgusted, and heartsick, McCutcheon walked into the rear room of the saloon near the bridge, and looked around.

There sat Micky Murphy, smiling, and as effusive as if this was the time set for their meeting, and he had anticipated it. He rose and extended his hand.

“I hope yees warn’t becoming worrit about mesilf.”

“Worried, Micky! I didn’t know what had happened to you; have you met with an accident?”

“Only a few trifling ones, such as getting me head broke and me ribs cracked.”

“What do you mean?”

The rosy face of the Irishman became rosier than ever; but he laughed and replied, —

“I won’t deny the same to a gintleman like yerself; but the thruth of it was, that after going to Sea Cliff, as I agreed, I started for home, and on the train who should I maat but Tim O’Shaughnessy and Pat O’Toole. They live at ^{Jamaica, N.Y.} Jamaky, and nothing would do but I should stop off long enough to make them a friendly call” —

"I understand," interrupted McCutcheon, wondering why he had not thought of it before; "you went on another spree."

"Where's the good of denying it? And it was one of the biggest, rip-roaringest, high old tears of me life; I'll niver forgit it, if I live to be as old as Methusalem. I came round all right this morning, barring a little buzzing in me head, caused, Pat and Tim told me, by the illigant clip I got in a little friendly scrimmage we had with their friends in Jamaky."

"Well, how did you make out?"

"I obsarved the gintleman sitting on the porch of the hotel at Sea Cliff; let me show you something."

Fishing in his inner coat pocket, he brought forth a piece of paper on which was a penciled picture of Mr. Gumbridge. The drawing and likeness would have done credit to a professional artist.

"Who did that?" asked the astonished youth.

"Mesilf," was the proud reply.

"Why, Micky, that can't be excelled; you have marked talent in that line."

"I took a squint at the gentleman whin he was raad-
ing a paper under one of the ^{trees} ^e traas, and didn't obsarve me."

"And do you tell me this is the man you saw coming out of our store at the time of the robbery?"

"No, sir; that wasn't the man."

“ But you described him accurately.”

“ You stopped me afore I was through ; if I had gone a little farther, ye might have learned more. I saw the face of the man so plain, I couldn’t be mistaken, and I’ve made a sketch of him, which perhaps ye may recognize.”

He drew out a second slip of paper, and laid it on the table before James McCutcheon, who was struck speechless when he scanned the features, lined so accurately that there could be no possible mistaking the identity of the individual.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

> JAMES McCUTCHEON sat at the table studying the excellent drawing which Micky Murphy, the Irishman, had placed in his hands. It was as well executed as the first, whose likeness to Mr. Gumbridge could not have been closer; and there was every reason to believe that the last was equally good. It bore some resemblance to Mr. Gumbridge; but, as has been stated, it was that of another man. *Picture Page 177*

While the youth was scrutinizing the work, the author sat smiling, with his eyes fixed on the face of the lad. Suddenly the latter looked up.

“Have you ever seen this man until you met him on that night, coming out of our store?”

“Niver; though I took him for Mr. Gumbridge, as ye calls him: and ye’ll admit there’s a ^{re}semblance betw^{ee}an the two of thim.”

“There is, undeniably, although this one has one characteristic that I did not expect to see.”

“What might be the same?”

“The side whiskers; I never saw them on him: they are the same as those of Mr. Gumbridge.”

“Which explains the mistake made by mesilf in say-

ing that he was the gintleman I had obsarved many a time in the store."

With his eyes again riveted on the presentment, McCutcheon was silent another full minute, when he looked up as abruptly as before.

"Micky, how long have you rented this saloon?"

"Ye can figure for yersilf; I took charge on the first of last May."

"Ah!"

There was a world of meaning in that ejaculation of the youth.

A flood of light had burst upon his brain. It gave him a glimpse of the truth. Carefully folding the paper and placing it in his pocket, he handed a bill of large denomination to Murphy.

"Phwat's that fur?" demanded the Irishman, looking upon the money, but hesitating to accept it.

"You have earned it; it is yours: don't refuse it."

"Be the powers, but I will until I understand phat it's fur."

"You have shown me who it was that entered our store and stole the diamond."

"Is there any reward offered for the finding of the same gintleman?"

"Well, no, I believe not; but what of that?"

"Did ye own the diamond?"

"Of course not."

"Thin phwat the blazes are ye offering me the money fur? If Mr. Gumbridge chooses to pay for the information I have given ye, I'll not object; but sorry's the day whin I takes anything from a loikely young gintleman like yersilf."

Micky sturdily refused, and McCutcheon was obliged to return the money to his pocket.

This little incident banished all the misgivings the youth had felt as to the integrity of the Irishman. In fact, he saw that he was truthful as the day itself. Had he not been, he never would have confessed that he was under the influence of liquor on the night he met the thief, and he would have framed some other excuse for his long absence from the city, instead of frankly admitting he was indulging in a "racket" of monumental proportions in the little Long Island town of Jamaica. True, he had hinted about a reward for the information he was able to furnish, but it was on the single condition that it should be given to him by the parties who could afford to do so, and who were directly interested.

"Micky," said McCutcheon, "I did have some doubts about your being right in this matter, and I will confess that I was not sure you were telling the truth; but I have no such fear now. I believe implicitly every word you have said, and there is not a doubt in my mind that you have given to me an excellent and ac-

curate likeness of the man who took the diamond, and whose identity not one of those looking for him has ever suspected."

"Micky Murphy has a good many failings," said the Irishman humbly, "but among them all there's one that niver was there, and that's lying; he would staal before doin' that."

"I don't doubt it; and may I ask that you will not tell any person about this until I give you permission?"

"I'm willing if it'll sarve ye, for what right has any one to come bothering me wid his questions?"

"There hasn't been any one trying it?" asked McCutcheon, uncertain whether his frequent visits to Micky's saloon had not been noticed by the detective.

"Niver a wan, save yersilf."

"I didn't know but some one of them had sought to pump you; and you haven't told any one else about this?"

"Niver a wan; for do you mind that there's mighty few who knows of the little ⁱⁿ sarcumstance ye have mentioned? If some one had spoken on the subject, I would have been likely to have convarsed and told him all I have told ye; but now Micky Murphy's lips are saaled till yersilf chooses to open thim."

With many thanks to the honest fellow, and with assurances that he should be remembered by the right ones, McCutcheon shook his hand and took his departure.

On the outside he looked searchingly around for suspicious people, but saw none, and took the car to his own home.

"I would care very little if that detective was hanging round," he reflected; "for I have no reason to fear him further. He can get nothing out of Murphy, and he's the only one that can give any information. Poor Wash Fulmer is not likely to last through another night, and we have nothing further to hide there.

"But," added the youth, his brows wrinkling with perplexity, "the mystery isn't cleared up yet. It seems impossible that Micky should be right, and yet I know he is. Some things more must be unraveled before the thing is explained. The truth is now bound to come out, but it's a strange story that must be first laid bare."

McCutcheon had broken a partial engagement for the sake of not missing Murphy; and glad he was that he did so, for the news he gathered was astonishing.

"If it wasn't for the temporary disgrace it would cause Ned, and the row his uncle would make," he mused with a smile, "I would advise him to let them arrest him, that his triumph might be the greater; but, after all, if they choose to arrest him, how can he help it? The detective who visited him at Ocean Beach assured him that all he had to do was to prove where he spent that night, and he would be cleared of every

possible suspicion. Ned refused absolutely, and why didn't they arrest him? It was Mr. Gumbridge's forbearance, for the case was suspicious enough to warrant it; and if it had been pressed it would have gone hard for a time with the fellow, for he would have died before breaking his promise to poor Wash. We didn't know a while ago but Wash would get well. He was so strong, so resolute, and so hopeful, that his mother and we imbibed something of the feeling. But the doctor has told her that he won't live twenty-four hours; and when he is gone our obligation to secrecy is ended. In fact, there is no reason now why it should be kept, except possibly the fear of a visit by the officers of the law at the time poor Wash is in his last extremity.

"I have no doubt that Ned is there now," continued the youth more gravely, as he drew out his watch and looked at the face; "Wash thinks all the world of him, and Ned deserves it. He came from the shore on purpose to be near him; he has spent money on the sick one which he could ill afford, for his uncle's course is mean in forbidding Mr. Gumbridge to pay him larger wages: I shouldn't be surprised if Ned has used part of the money he saved for vacation, so that he couldn't afford to stay any longer at Ocean Beach; it would be just like him.

"I would go round to Fulmer myself, even if it is so

late, if I didn't know he would rather have Ned, and he expected to go. Ah! why didn't I think of it?"

He started up in excitement, and was on the point of leaving the car to take another down-town, when, recalling how late it was, he settled back in his seat.

"It will do as well to-morrow; in fact, I won't gain anything by sending the dispatch to-night."

On the morrow, before going to the store, he stopped in the Western Union building and sent a cablegram to London, saying to himself as he did so, —

"The answer to that will solve the mystery."

And he was right. ✓

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE reader has perceived that the two detectives whose energies were centered on finding the person that had taken the black diamond from the safe of Shipman & Gumbridge were working from different standpoints.

Erastus Blowitz wanted to believe that Ned Melton was innocent; and yet, as he saw it, every indication pointed unerringly to the youth as the criminal. His efforts, therefore, were devoted to weaving the net around him, despite his own personal sympathy. True, there were times when his admiration and regard for the youth led him to doubt what may be said to have been the evidence of his own senses, and to feel a loathing for his task; yet his training and predominating sentiment of duty kept him at it until, when on the very threshold of discovery, a serious illness lifted him out of the *rôle* of detective, and held him idle for more than a week.

On the other hand, James McCutcheon, guided by a natural detective instinct, was approaching the true solution, but he started from another standpoint; he knew Ned Melton was innocent. Had he chosen, he

could have uttered the words that would have proven it within an hour; but his lips were sealed, as were those of Ned Melton himself, upon the one vital question,—where his friend spent the night on which the robbery occurred. He knew, but he dare not tell until the occurrence of a certain expected event, which at the first seemed to be weeks, months, and even an indefinite period distant. True, his investigation tended toward the same goal as that of Detective Blowitz; for, while one was aiming to fasten the guilt upon Melton, the other sought to ascertain who the real criminal was. When this was learned, the two detectives must arrive at the same destination, and their conclusions be identical. But, as I have shown, the light that fell upon each path came from a different point.

Enough has been told to show that McCutcheon was advancing toward the true solution. Nothing was surer than that he would reach it in time.

It was the same intuition that kept his lips sealed toward Melton himself. He was tempted more than once to tell him what he was doing; but, so long as a doubt remained in his own mind as to his success, he deemed it best not to do so. He might awaken hope only to be disappointed.

“As soon as I receive an answer to my cablegram,” he reflected on his way to the store, “I will tell Ned all, and we will have a good laugh over the opening of eyes

that will follow. I wonder now whether that detective has given up the task? Not likely; for those gentry hang on like grim death. He is at work somewhere, and will turn up when least expected."

Having sent his dispatch under the sea, he was nervously anxious for the reply. It might come within an hour or two, or might be delayed until the next day, and possibly longer. He could not help feeling uneasy until it arrived. Although it was the dull season, the store had more business that day than for any time in weeks. A number of important customers appeared, and one of their traveling agents spent a couple of hours talking business with the two clerks. He was about setting out on a trip that would take him as far West as Denver, and it was necessary to complete his arrangements.

McCutcheon was glad this was so, since it gave his mind the occupation it needed. But for that, the slow passing hours would have been almost intolerable to him. The haunting fear with McCutcheon was that an officer might appear at any moment and arrest Melton. Had it been himself that was concerned, the youth would not have cared, knowing, as he did, that vindication was at hand. He had half wished more than once that he would be taken in charge by the authorities, for the same triumph awaited him. But in his cooler moments he shrank from the thought. Colonel Bain-

bridge, the guardian of his friend, was expected home almost any day, and, to say the least, he would make it mightily unpleasant for his nephew. Besides, the certainty that the lad would be under suspicion for a long time, and that with the majority of mankind the accusation of crime is accepted as proof of guilt, filled him with a great dread.

There could be no question that the situation from the first would have authorized Ned's arrest. Why it had not been made, was due to the forbearance of Mr. Gumbridge, who manifestly demanded further proof. But he was a man of such uncompromising principles, that he was likely to become impatient as time passed, and insist that the prosecution should be mercilessly urged. McCutcheon suspected the reason why the gentleman had left town so suddenly and joined his family on Long Island. ⁴He could not bear the worry and anxiety, and meant to stay away until some definite clew was struck. That was liable to reach him at any time; for a detective cannot be expected to keep at work for a week and more without accomplishing something definite. He must report to his employer, and demonstrate that he is "pushing things."

The afternoon was half gone, and business was slacking up, when a messenger boy entered the store. McCutcheon's heart gave a quick throb, believing, as he did, that he had brought at last the delayed reply to

his cablegram. But the envelope in his hand bore the name of Edmund Melton, who opened it.

"What I expected," he remarked in a low voice, as he passed it to his friend.

"Yes ; I looked for it before this," replied McCutcheon, who read the words, —

"Don't delay : Washington is dying.

HIS MOTHER."

"Go at once," said McCutcheon ; "I will look after the store."

There were tears in the eyes of both as Ned quickly changed his working-coat for his street one, donned his hat, and hurried off toward the elevated railway.

"To think," mused McCutcheon when left alone, "that Ned Melton should ever be suspected of doing wrong. He is one of the noblest young fellows that ever lived. (While he is at the bedside of a sick fellow, who has no claim upon him other than that of humanity, some one opens the safe and takes out the black diamond. Straightway Ned is suspected of being the thief, and probably at this moment more than one are certain he is, and are pressing all their efforts toward proving it. But let them do their worst ; right is right, for God is God, and he shall triumph over them all."

Not another customer entered the store during the rest of the afternoon.

The traveling agent had gone, and McCutcheon sat behind the counter, idly watching the people passing to and fro on the pavement, and giving free rein to his meditations.

It lacked yet some minutes of five o'clock when he began his preparations for closing. He completed the work in his usual thorough manner, and, when through, followed the footsteps of his friend, who had left several hours before. McCutcheon had become so accustomed to looking for the detective who had shadowed them for several days, that he glanced suspiciously at every one in sight, and, while waiting on the platform of the elevated, scrutinized his companions. He was sure no one was present who felt any interest in him; for there happened to be but two, — a barefooted urchin and an Irish woman with an immense market-basket.

"I wouldn't care if there were a half-dozen," he reflected, while stepping on the cars; "for we have nothing more to dread. I haven't got my answer from across the ocean yet; but, no matter what it may be, Ned is safe."

Despite the self-confidence of the young man, there was just a grain of misgiving in his mental calculations. If the answer should be disappointing, it could not shake his faith in Ned Melton. He knew that the boy spent the eventful night with Wash Fulmer; for Ned told him so, and the sick boy and his mother had con-

firmed it. But McCutcheon could not testify of his own personal knowledge that such was the fact; for, as the reader will recall, he was at his own home that evening, with several friends, and never once saw Ned. The testimony of Mrs. Fulmer would be all that was of a positive nature, and the value of that might be impeached by the officers of the law. It was this shadowy fear which hovered in the background of young McCutcheon's hopes, and prevented that feeling of absolute certainty of victory that otherwise would have come to him.

Passing along Houston Street, with his meditations transferred to the sad scene awaiting him, he hurried his footsteps, and strained his eyes to catch sight of that which he dreaded to see.

It was there, — a black crape fluttering from the door-knob. — The end, so far as poor Wash Fulmer was concerned, had come; he was dead, and the seal on the lips of Ned Melton and James McCutcheon was removed.

Death had removed it, and they could now speak.

CHAPTER XXX.

WILTON GUMBRIDGE, the wealthy jeweler in diamonds, had a delightful time with his family at the Sea Cliff House at Sea Cliff, Long Island; that is, for a brief while. *My,*

He took several rides down the frightfully steep incline to the wharf, and reflected on what would follow if the two cables parted and let the car descend the precipice, as if driven from the throat of a massive columniad; he took his family out on the Sound several times; he indulged in delightful drives through the surrounding country; he sat under some of the trees and read his paper, or, leaning back in his easy-chair, listened to the incessant prattle of the score and more of Cubans who flocked thither, and whose tongues never seemed to grow weary; he took a hand in the progressive euchre party, and would have won the first prize — that is, if it had been given to the one who scored the lowest number of points. He had a merry time frolicking with his little daughter, and spent many sweet hours chatting with the wife who grew dearer to him as the years passed over their heads. *22,*

But all this time he was uneasy, and as the days

wore on he grew more so. He had told his wife nothing about the black diamond, his reason being a wish to save her all unnecessary worry, for she would have shared what was his; but he became impatient at the receipt of no news. He had sought to get away from the annoying matter, and had done so more utterly than he anticipated. Finally he sent a brief note to Detective Blowitz, asking for information. Three days passed and there was no reply. Then he telegraphed, and two more days went by and brought no response. About this time Mr. Gumbridge's impatience turned into something like indignation.

"I am paying Blowitz a liberal sum to push this matter, and he doesn't think I am of enough account to give any attention to my letters or telegrams. The business cannot have taken him so far from his home that he didn't receive one or the other. There's one way of finding out."

That was to go to New York, and he did it the next day. To his surprise, on calling at the home of Blowitz, he found that gentleman, pale and thin, sitting in his easy-chair. He smiled faintly when he recognized his caller, and managed to rise to his feet with a little of his old vigor as he greeted his friend. All Gumbridge's impatience vanished at sight of the officer. He expressed his sympathy, and asked how he was getting along.

"Yesterday was the first time I sat up," replied Blowitz; "I read your letter and telegram, and sent off a reply last night which I had to dictate."

"I left Sea Cliff this morning before your letter arrived, so this is all news to me. But tell me the whole thing."

Detective Blowitz related the story, which is familiar to the reader.

"I am picking up rapidly," he added in conclusion, "and was just making ready for a trip down-town. You see, I have been eliminated as a factor in the problem for more than a week, and the result is that I shall have to begin over again. A fellow can't do much work with fever rioting in his veins and his brain topsyturvy; but the doctor says I am all the better for my little set-back. The poison was in my system, but it is all gone, and I am like a garment that needed cleansing, and has had a thorough one."

"You think there is no risk in going out?"

"The doctor told me that if the day proved pleasant, it would be much better for me than to stay in the house. This is one of the most delightful days of the whole summer. It is cool, with a gentle breeze blowing, and I long for the ride."

"I will call a carriage, and we'll make things comfortable," said the visitor, stepping to the telephone and ordering a vehicle and driver. "Wouldn't you like to take a turn through Central Park?"

"No ; it's a good way there, and something tells me I should go to your store. — I can't explain the reason ; but my experience has taught me that whenever such an impulse comes over me, it is unsafe for me to disregard it. So, if you are willing, we will ride down there, have a talk, and look around."

"You know that young Melton has returned to his work ?"

"Yes ; I found that out before I fell ill : he threw off something of his vacation."

"A few days ; I presume he was too uneasy at the seashore to enjoy himself."

In telling about his illness, Detective Blowitz did not explain all the circumstances. He merely said that while at work he was taken down so suddenly and unexpectedly that he was barely able to get to his home and bed, after which, for several days, everything was a blank to him. The old secretive instinct closed his lips against any definite revelation to his employer, until he had gotten farther along the tortuous road he was trying to follow. Understanding his repugnance to speaking on these points, Mr. Gumbridge did not ask the questions that he knew would be parried, though he was eager to gather any possible crumbs of comfort within reach.

✓ This day was destined to be a red letter one to McCutcheon and Melton and Mr. Gumbridge.) It was not

quite noon, and there were no customers in the store, when the two clerks were astonished to see the carriage halt in front, out of which their employer stepped, and turned to help Detective Blowitz, who, with a smile, waved him away.

“I’m not quite as bad as that; but to-morrow it will be I who will help you to get around.”

“Not for twenty years yet!” responded the jeweler; “I’ll give you a lesson in gymnastics one of these days that will make you open your eyes.”

“I’ve no doubt of it; I always open my eyes at the tumbles of the clown in the circus.”

Mr. Gumbridge shook the hands of his clerks warmly, inquired after McCutcheon’s health, and introduced his companion under his right name, though making no allusion to his profession. McCutcheon, despite the man’s evident feebleness, suspected it, and Ned fancied there was something in his voice which recalled the visitor to the hotel porch at Ocean Beach; but neither he nor McCutcheon showed their suspicion by word or manner.

Mr. Gumbridge and his companion walked to the office and sat down, the boys wondering what was coming next. It was on the jeweler’s mind more than once to ask his clerks whether they had heard anything about the missing diamond, but Blowitz shook his head. He therefore spoke only of the business of the store

during his absence, and, as was to be expected, received a satisfactory account from the young men.

It was at this juncture that a telegraph boy arrived, and McCutcheon's heart gave another bound.

But lo! the lad bore two telegrams. One was for James McCutcheon, and the other for Shipman & Gumbridge. The last-named gentleman opened his, read the words, and then exclaimed, —

“Well, in the name of the seven wonders, what can that mean?”

“What can what mean?” asked the detective.

“Read that and explain it if you can,” replied Mr. Gumbridge, passing the paper to Blowitz, who kept his chair, while his friend flung himself into his own seat.

The detective read the following, —

AMSTERDAM, August —, 18 —.

SHIPMAN & GUMBRIDGE,
Maiden Lane, New York:

The black diamond was delivered to us to-day.

HAMMER & SCHWARTZFELDT.

It was an amazing message indeed; but James McCutcheon smiled when he read his, for it bore upon the same question, and furnished the additional light that was needed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE story of young Washington Fulmer was that which, alas ! may be told of many a youth in this broad land of ours.

His father died too early in life for them to remember him, and left his mother with a moderate competence, which sufficed barely to support her and the only child. The latter was bright, alert, and industrious, but, while yet a small boy, developed a waywardness that soon brought grief to the sorrowing widow's heart. He would steal, and lost several situations because of yielding to the propensity. Finally, when seventeen years old, he joined a gang similar to the notorious Whyos in another part of the city, and for weeks was engaged in wrong-doing that compelled him to dodge the officers of the law.

It was about this time that Ned Melton and James McCutcheon, who were "slumming" through Houston Street and the neighborhood, engaged in practical work for their Master, came across young Fulmer, and took him in hand. They persuaded him to attend some of the meetings of the Y. M. C. A., that admirable organization, the extent of whose good works shall never

be known until the last great day; and everything looked hopeful for the youth's thorough reformation and a starting upon a new and better life.

But the evil hour came one night, when a couple of the gang ran afoul of Fulmer, coaxed him to drink beer, and then induced him to join them in the burglary of a wealthy residence up-town. During the commission of that crime, the owner of the house was shot dead by the leader of the criminals, who was captured, and suffered the extreme penalty of the law. He was "game," however, and refused to give away his missing companion. The second member was run down by the police, and sent to Sing Sing for a long term. This miscreant revealed that the third and missing member was Wash Fulmer, who, he declared, was as guilty as he.

In one sense this was the fact, and in another it was not; for young Fulmer was the party who stood outside to give warning of the approach of the officers, and he therefore took no actual part in the crime which resulted in the death of an estimable citizen. But the convict was angered because Fulmer did not apprise them in time of the descent of the cops, who came down on them like a cyclone, and from whom the sentinel escaped by a hair's breadth.

Fulmer fled the city, and remained for weeks in hiding. He knew a large reward was offered for his capture, and if he fell into the power of the law, nothing

could save him from State prison. But through all his crooked ways the lad retained a love for his mother, whose heart he had nearly broken. Alone, among strangers too, he began to reflect upon his life and to recall the gentle words of Melton and McCutcheon. He warmed especially toward the former, who, he felt, was the truest of friends to him. Remorse was followed by repentance, and he determined at last to return to his mother, to confess all to her and to the two young men, and to leave the result to Providence.

He had hardly reached this decision when he was seized with the illness that was destined to carry him off with startling swiftness. The first attack convinced him that he had not long to live. All now that he asked was that he might be given time to prepare for death and make his peace with the heaven he had so offended.

One dark, stormy night, after reconnoitering his home for more than an hour, he stole through the front door, and a minute later was clasped in the arms of his weeping mother. The observant parent only knew that her darling boy was with her again, and her heart filled with gratitude when he declared that he had repented and henceforth meant to lead a good life.

But she saw, too, the signs of illness upon him. She forced him to bed, and sent for a physician. The first thing that the lad asked was that Ned Melton

should come to see him. The mother hesitated to send for the youth; for the officers had been at her house several times looking for her son, and she feared it was still under surveillance. She put off her boy; but he was so urgent, that at last she dropped a note to Ned Melton, asking him to make sure that no one observed his visit.

Ned was quick to respond, and no officer noticed his call. He shook the hand of the stricken youth, prayed with him, gave him sympathetic words, and encouraged him to persevere in the good resolutions he had formed. McCutcheon called several times; but it was Ned Melton who was closer to the lad's heart, and upon whom he leaned most heavily as the shadows of death gathered round him.

Had young Fulmer been well and strong, no one could have dissuaded him from surrendering to the officers of the law, and receiving the punishment which he felt he deserved; but, so long as he was confined to his bed, he did not wish to be disturbed. He asked and received from Melton and McCutcheon their pledge that, under no circumstances, would they tell any one of his presence in the house until he got well; for already the treacherous nature of his disease began raising hopes that were never to be fulfilled.

It is safe to say that had young Fulmer known the situation in which young Melton was to be placed by

the theft of the black diamond, he would have insisted on removing the suspicion without delay, but he never knew it.

Ned Melton continued his visits, which were prompted by the purest motives that can actuate humanity. He knew he was helping to shelter a criminal from the law, but he never doubted that he was doing his Master true service; and, as has been shown, his own threatened disgrace never tempted him to break the promise given to the lad who lay on his death-bed. If that stricken one died, the seal would be removed; if he lived, it rested with him whether it should be or not.

A part of the money which Ned had saved for his vacation went in the purchase of delicacies for the boy, and he spent many hours at his bedside, pointing out how infinitely more happy is that person who lives in the approbation of his heavenly Father than is he who gains worldly honor, wealth, or fame. The boy listened yearningly to the counsels, until his prayer was that he might be spared to prove by a life of good deeds how fervent and true was his repentance. That boon, however, was denied him; but we would be presumptuous were we to doubt that the One who never turns a deaf ear to the truly penitent, consented to hear the cry of poor Wash Fulmer as it went up to him when the mortal darkness was closing around him.

Ned Melton was not summoned from the seashore by any call from his dying friend; but it was his fear that he was closer to the end than he suspected, and the knowledge that he longed for him as he longed for no other one, that led him to make his visit to his home at a time when a stay at the seaside was most tempting, and his vacation was but half gone. On the night of the taking of the black diamond, he reached the home at about nine o'clock in the evening. Young Fulmer had one of his bad turns that night, and Dr. Meredith had been sent for in haste. He administered what restoratives he could, and departed just before the arrival of Ned Melton.

The latter's presence and cheery words did more than the medicine to tone up the invalid. He was longing for the presence of the manly, handsome Ned Melton, who was not ashamed to kneel and pray at his bedside, and who knew how to say just the things that a hungry, famishing soul needs when in extremity. He was aware that Ned was at the seaside on his vacation; and, though he had insisted that he should be sent for if Wash grew worse, the lad was too unselfish to permit it.

It can be understood, therefore, how he brightened up when, in answering the startling ring at the door, his mother brought the very one he wished to see more than any one else in the world. When it was gently

proposed toward midnight that Ned should return to his home, he shook his head, and said with a laugh, —

“You can’t get rid of me in that fashion; it’s been so long since I’ve seen Wash, that I’m going to stay all night with him.”

The countenance of the sick boy glowed at these words, and he inwardly called down the blessings of heaven on the lad who had become so dear to him.

“If I do get well,” he said to himself, “I will prove in some way my gratitude. It would be a pleasure to die for him, for he has been the means of saving me.”

The mother apologized for the poor accommodations of the place, and expressed the fear that it was not good enough for their visitor; but her gratitude and affection for him were as deep as that of her son.

“Now, I don’t want to hear anything more of that,” he protested; “when Wash gets asleep, I’ll take a snooze on the lounge. I’ll lay this cane within his reach, and if I don’t wake when he wants me he can give me a whack over the head.”

The boy smiled at the thought of striking his friend even gently, while the mother thought it her duty to sit by the side of her son through the night.

“You won’t do anything of the kind,” replied Ned; “I have been having a jolly time at the seashore, while you’ve been watching and nursing until any one can see you are worn out. Go to your own room; go to

sleep, and don't dare open your eyes until the sun shines to-morrow."

"But it may be necessary" —

Ned sprang to his feet, caught the wan woman in his powerful arms, and playfully pushed her out of the room.

"There!" said he, with mock seriousness at the door; "don't you dare show yourself here again unless I call you; I want you to understand that I am boss to-night."

Mrs. Fulmer could not but obey, and she did so smilingly; for somehow or other that young man seemed to bring all the sunshine from out-doors with him, and was irresistible.

When Ned returned and took his seat by the bedside, he saw the sick boy shaking with mirth. The whole thing was so odd he could not help it. It was the first time he had laughed in a long while, and it proved, too, to be the last time of his life.

So it was, that all through the night of the disappearance of the black diamond, Ned Melton was acting the part of the Good Samaritan, and doing the business of his Master.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE observant Detective Blowitz, even in the flurry of the receipt of the cablegram by Mr. Gumbridge, noticed that a second one was handed to McCutcheon. He said nothing at the moment, but, accepting the one proffered him by the jeweler, read it carefully, and then thoughtfully stroked his chin.

"Um-um!" he muttered; "that is rather odd."

"Odd!" repeated Mr. Gumbridge; "it is unaccountable."

"I don't know about that; there are few things in this world that cannot be explained when everything is known."

"I should like to have you or any one else explain that," insisted the agitated gentleman, walking back to his office and taking his seat by him. He had awakened to the fact that he was speaking rather louder than was prudent, especially as a customer entered the store at that moment, and Ned Melton stepped forward to wait on him.

"This seems to hint that the stone has made a voyage across the ocean since last you saw it."

"It doesn't intimate it, it says so," insisted the

jeweler, catching it up and reading the message again.

“Yes, sir; ‘The black diamond was delivered to us to-day.’ That’s what it says.”

“How long ago was it taken from the safe?”

“Over two weeks.”

“Precisely; that gives it time enough to reach Amsterdam by the usual route.”

“But how the mischief did it get there?”

“It probably went most of the way by steamer.”

Mr. Gumbridge looked at the imperturbable detective with such a reproving expression that the latter laughed, and the former uttered an impatient sentence.

The truth is, that no man feels in a more jubilant mood than he who is rapidly recovering from severe illness. Besides that, the sagacious detective saw that the moment had come when the cloud of suspicion that had gathered over Ned Melton’s head was fast vanishing, and would soon disappear forever. He could not repress a certain boyishness of manner, even though it grated upon the feelings of the friend with him. Finally, however, he forced himself to be serious.

“Gumbridge,” said he, “invite that clerk here; I would like to ask him a few questions.”

“Which one?”

“McCutcheon; he’s an unusually bright fellow.”

The high opinion which Detective Blowitz lately formed of that young man had greatly increased of late.

McCutcheon overheard the words, but he waited for the invitation of his employer, which was given immediately.

“McCutcheon,” said Blowitz, waving him to a seat, “you are as much interested in solving the mystery that has bothered us for a fortnight as any one of us; am I right?”

The youth nodded his head, but forced back the smile that was twitching at the corner of his lips. He suspected the drift matters were taking, and meant to have a little entertainment out of it.

“If I am not mistaken, you have been doing a little detective work yourself.”

“I have made a few attempts I’ll admit; but what could I do against a veteran like yourself? Why do you suspect me, sir?”

“I don’t suspect you; I am sure of it.”

“I should like to know your grounds.”

Detective Blowitz assumed a sternness which he was far from feeling, and recounted some of McCutcheon’s movements which had aroused his suspicion. Gumbridge listened with increasing interest, and McCutcheon, unabashed, made answer with a smile, —

“The gentleman who called on Ned Melton at Ocean Beach and urged him to tell where he spent the night on which the black diamond was taken, who tried to track him to a certain house in Houston Street, who

hovered about the front of this store, who looked at times like a laboring-man or sporting-man, is, if I mistake not, the same individual who is subjecting me to examination at this moment."

Gumbridge shook with silent laughter, and slapped the detective on the shoulder, —

"He's got you, Erastus!"

"I think I'll have to shake on that," said Blowitz, extending his hand; "you and Melton did your parts well, even though I managed to find out that the number of the house on Houston Street is —, in which you were so much interested."

Blowitz thought this would stagger the young man; but the latter replied: —

"That is correct, and we have not the slightest objection to your knowing it. You will recall, I think, that Ned Melton told you that if a certain expected event took place he would give you the information. That event has taken place."

"What was it?"

"The death of Washington Fulmer, the young man whom he and I visited at No. — Houston Street."

"Who was Wash Fulmer?"

"A young man that committed a crime, that truly repented, and that has gone to the last Judge of us all. Ned and I gave him our promise that we would not reveal his hiding-place, and it seems we kept it effectually from you."

“Not as effectually as you think; for I learned it more than a week ago.”

“Why, then, did you not inform the officers of the law?”

“Why should I do so? I may tell you that I saw young Fulmer face to face; that I knew at once he had but a short time to live. What could have been gained by betraying him? The officers would merely have placed the house under surveillance, and might have embittered his dying hours. I had too much humanity for that.

“No, sir; if either you or Melton had told me the secret, it would have been safe with me.”

“I would like to shake hands with you again,” said McCutcheon, extending his hand. In the last minute his feeling of a certain kind of contempt for the detective had changed to respect and admiration. He had proven he had a heart.

“Yes,” said Blowitz, settling back in his chair; “you two youngsters were so sharp that it did not take me long to find it impossible to shadow you on the street. So I secured quarters near by, and soon located the house. I saw you reconnoitering along one side of the street, and signaling to Melton when to go in and when to come out; I secured entrance myself, without the young man or his mother suspecting my business or profession; I discovered his mortal illness, and then

went home sick myself, and kept my bed for a week, and here I am."

"I respect you for the feeling you showed," said McCutcheon, "and I have no doubt that you would have been the last one to add suffering to the dying hours of poor Fulmer. All the same, however, neither Ned nor I would have told you the secret."

"I honor you for the devotion to the lad. Had he been a well young man, I would have turned him over to the officers without hesitation."

"No; you would not."

"And why?"

"He would have saved you the trouble; it was only his mortal illness that prevented. He was a genuine penitent, if there ever was one in the world."

"And Ned's visits, as well as those of yourself, were to comfort and cheer him?" said Mr. Gumbridge.

"They were; though Ned called far oftener than I, and was the instrument under Heaven of bringing the poor fellow to see the error of his ways, and to point him to the only help that remained."

"You are two noble lads," said Mr. Gumbridge, as the moisture gathered in his eyes; "Erastus, how many opportunities you and I throw away on the score of pressing business. Ah," he added with a sigh, "what excuse shall we make at the last great day?"

"None, I am afraid, that will satisfy the Questioner,"

replied the detective gravely ; “ many of us will go empty-handed instead of bearing sheaves.”

“ And it will be our own fault,” suggested McCutcheon, impelled to make one effort to drive the truth home.

“ Since it has been established that Melton is innocent,” pursued Blowitz after a pause, “ only one thing is left ; that is, to ascertain who took the diamond.”

“ Does any question remain ? Do you and Mr. Gumbridge doubt that the stone is in Amsterdam ? ”

“ No ; but who could have taken it from the safe ? ”

“ Inasmuch,” said McCutcheon with a meaning smile, “ as the innocence of Mr. Gumbridge, of Gibbons, Melton, and myself has been established, there is only one other person who possibly could have done it.”

“ You mean Mr. Shipman ? ” exclaimed the astonished partner ; “ impossible ! ”

“ And why impossible ? ”

“ He is in Europe.”

“ He is now ; but he was in New York a little over two weeks ago.”

“ How do you know that ? ”

“ I addressed a cablegram to his son Richard in London yesterday. The reply was delayed, but it arrived at the same time as yours, and here it is.”

As he spoke, he handed his sheet of paper to Mr. Gumbridge, who read the following, —

“ Father was there, of course ; particulars by mail.”

“That settles it,” said Mr. Gumbridge with a sigh of relief; “but why didn’t he come and see me, or leave some explanation? I don’t understand it.”

“Wait till his letter arrives.”

“That’s what we’ll have to do,” said Detective Blowitz.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHILE the conversation of Gumbridge, Detective Blowitz, and McCutcheon was in progress, Ned Melton was engaged in looking after the store. There was an unusual run for the dull season, and he caught few of the words that passed. He could hear the hum of voices, for they had modulated their tones; but, inasmuch as he made no effort to overhear anything said, the thread of the talk was lost upon him.

"Of course," said Mr. Gumbridge after a minute's thought, "it has been established that Mr. Shipman took the diamond; that is proof that it was not stolen, for he was the means of having it forwarded to us, and he had as much right to open the safe and take it out as I, for neither of us owned it. But what puzzles me is why he did not either see or write to me."

"He did write to you," said McCutcheon, in his quiet manner.

The jeweler and detective turned inquiringly upon him, and the former asked, —

"How do you know that?"

"There is an intimation of it in his son's cablegram. Besides, I never suspected that Mr. Shipman was a man inclined to practical jokes."

"He never was, so far as I know; but let me look at that message again," said Mr. Gumbridge, taking up the paper received a few minutes before by McCutcheon.

"U-m-m, I'd like to see how you figure out anything about a letter in those few words."

"The words, as I construe them, express surprise. It costs a good deal to send words ^{under} across the sea; but Mr. Richard Shipman takes the trouble, after answering my question, to add 'of course,' which shows that he is astonished at my question. He wouldn't have been surprised, had he not known that his father had written you an explanation before that, or at the time he took the diamond from the safe. Depend upon it, he wrote you a note at the time, which you failed to receive, or, receiving, lost without reading."

Detective Blowitz studied the countenance of young McCutcheon, and felt a growing admiration for his mental acuteness.

"I agree with him," he said, nodding his head; "but we may as well bring an end to speculation and await the arrival of facts. The great burden is lifted, and we can afford to wait. I think now I will return to my house, as the day is getting well along."

The reader knows that McCutcheon was right respecting the letter, which it cannot be said "never came," for it did come; and its loss was not chargeable

to the United States mail, nor to any neglect on the part of Mr. Shipman, the writer. Mention has been made of such a missive as having been received by Mr. Gumbridge shortly after the diamond was missing, but which he, in his mental abstraction, dropped on the floor of his room without observing. This was the hasty explanation written by his partner, and which, if read, would have made clear that which for a long time seemed beyond explanation.

Without quoting the last letter of the senior partner, its import may be given.

When Mr. Shipman was traveling with his family through Europe, he reached the city of Amsterdam, and called upon the famous diamond firm of Hammer & Schwartzfeldt, with whom his house had had dealings for more than a score of years. Both he and his partner had made similar calls before, as was natural with a house with which they maintained such intimate business relations.

At his hotel, however, that morning, Mr. Shipman had received a cablegram from a capitalist in New York informing him that it was imperatively necessary that he should come to the metropolis without delay, in order to close a transaction involving several hundred thousand dollars, and which could not be settled without his presence, which would not be necessary for more than an hour or two.

Mr. Shipman had decided to sail from Liverpool on one of the "ocean greyhounds;" and, having a little time at his disposal, dropped into the house of the Dutch diamond dealers. While there Mr. Hammer mentioned that they had received an offer for the celebrated black diamond, which proved to be about the same sum that had been accepted by R. Field McFarlane, and which fact, of course, was unsuspected by either him or Mr. Shipman. Mr. Hammer added that, if the stone was not sold, he would be obliged if it was returned to them. Mr. Shipman replied that he was convinced it was unsold; and as he was on the point of sailing for New York, with the expectation of immediately returning, he would engage to bring it back with him. With this understanding he and his family left for London, where they were to await his return.

He was just in time to catch the *Etruria*, and landed in New York on the evening of the day already referred to many times.

The last letter received from his partner was written from Sea Cliff, Long Island, and he supposed he was still summering there. ^{N.Y.} Had he known or suspected he was at the Astor House, he would have called there immediately on his arrival. Not knowing it, he took a carriage to the Hoffman House, where the important business meeting was to be held. As was natural, when such a large sum of money is involved, the inter-

view lasted until late at night. Mr. Shipman was anxious to return to his family without delay. He had learned that a fast steamer sailed at seven o'clock the next morning, and he decided to take that. But he intended to carry the black diamond with him. He therefore walked down Broadway, reached the store between twelve and one o'clock, took out the stone, closed and secured the safe, and actually stayed over night at the hotel where Mr. Gumbridge was sleeping, neither party ever suspecting the fact. It was at the Astor House that he sat down in the small hours of the morning and wrote the letter to his partner, explaining that he had taken the jewel, giving the reason why he did so, and asking Mr. Gumbridge, in the event of his having accepted an offer for it, to telegraph him at once, that the gem might be returned.

> This letter, instead of leaving at the office of the hotel, he carried to his room, and the next morning, while on his way to the steamer, dropped it in a letter-box. Its fate has already been told. Its reception was delayed, and, when received, the seal was never broken. Mr. Shipman continued his voyage to London, never dreaming of the flurry his act had caused, and which never could have taken place had not the junior partner in his absent-mindedness lost the missive containing the facts. ✓ Page 114

Rather oddly, on the very day the second explana-

tory letter came to hand, Mr. McFarlane entered the store to make inquiries concerning the missing stone.

"I am pleased to inform you it has been found," replied Mr. Gumbridge.

"Ah, how was that?"

"Mr. Shipman took it with him to Amsterdam, where the owners of it have received an offer which happens to be just the same as yours. Of course Mr. Shipman was unaware at that time of your purchase."

"That's too bad; I suppose it is gone, then, so far as I am concerned."

"I hope not; I have telegraphed the owners in Amsterdam, telling them that I had sold it before their offer was received, and unless they have actually delivered it to their purchaser, I expect them to return it to me for my customer, who is justly entitled to it."

"Have you received any word?"

"A message came yesterday saying that it would be shipped at once. The black diamond, like the Kohinoor and other famous stones, seems destined to become a globe trotter."

"I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness and trouble, which is more than I expected."

"I have done no more than was clearly what I ought to have done, and I shall be much disappointed if you fail to receive it."

"Well, you have my card; kindly send me word when it arrives, and I will call."

Assuring his customer that the matter would be attended to, Mr. Gumbridge quietly awaited the issue of events. It may be added that the precious stone came safely to hand, and passed into the possession of R. Field McFarlane, who lost no time in presenting it to his affianced; and, at the present writing, it is the most prized gift of that young lady, who has lately exchanged her name for that of the donor of the wonderful gift jewel.

Poor Wash Fulmer was dead, and gone to his last account; not the smell of fire remained about the garments of Ned Melton, and I wish I could close this history as I would like to do, and as the reader expects it to be done; but we are now upon the threshold of a series of events involving young Melton and others who have been named, and attracting attention in many portions of the country, and awakening a thrill of sympathy that has not yet died away.

Colonel Marcellus Bainbridge, the uncle and guardian of young Melton, moved back to the city in September, shortly after Mr. Shipman returned on the heels of the black diamond. The first thing that McCutcheon noticed after shaking hands with the senior partner was, that during his absence he had grown side whiskers after the fashion of those worn by Mr. Gumbridge. There was a natural resemblance between the two gentlemen, who were about the same age. The

fact of the whiskers is mentioned as a tribute to the artistic skill of Mr. Micky Murphy, who made such a faithful sketch of the individual that abstracted the black diamond from the safe of the firm, and who received a generous reward for the unique help he rendered in reaching the truth.

Mr. Shipman had a hearty laugh over the story; but, like his partner, he appreciated the admirable part played by McCutcheon, and especially Ned Melton. He complimented them in a few words, being opposed to saying a great deal; but, on the first opportunity, he called on Colonel Bainbridge, whom he had known well for a good many years.

"Colonel," said he in his off-hand manner, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"What are you driving at now?" asked the fiery old soldier, lighting his corn-cob pipe and offering a cigar to his caller, as they seated themselves in the library.

"Your sister must have been of a very different disposition from you."

"Will you explain what the mischief you mean?" demanded his host good-naturedly.

"Why, that nephew of yours is one of the finest young men I ever knew."

"What of that?"

"I was wondering how he came to be so; I have concluded that he must have inherited his fine qualities

from his father and mother, and the latter must have been the opposite of yourself."

"A poor joke — a poor joke," grunted Colonel Bainbridge, puffing his pipe; "I would like to laugh, but I don't feel able."

"What I want to get at is this: we have been following your orders respecting Edmund, which were that he should not receive more than ten dollars a week."

"Umph!" grunted Colonel Bainbridge, puffing away, and suspecting what was coming.

"It was a confounded shame, but we have stuck to it; he won't accept any more pay from us without your consent."

"Not being a scamp, of course he won't."

"We want to raise his salary."

"How much?"

"Oh, a few dollars or so."

Mr. Shipman did not think it best to say that the salary he and his partner had fixed as the proper one was thirty dollars a week.

"You see," he added, "Edmund is eighteen years old; he is worth as much as either Gibbons or McCutcheon, and it isn't right that he should be deprived of his rights through a whim."

The last word was unfortunate. The colonel bristled up on the instant. A flush overspread his countenance as he replied, —

“ I regard your words, sir, as an impertinence. I have made known my wishes ; if you or my nephew are not willing to follow them, I shall take him away from your store. Those wishes are that he shall receive ten dollars a week, and not a penny more, until he reaches his majority. Then he will be at liberty to make a fool of himself as most young men like him do.”

“ You are doing him great injustice ” —

“ That’s enough ; if there is anything else you wish to talk about, I will listen ; if there is not, it’s best your call should terminate.”

Mr. Shipman repressed his indignation, and, taking up his hat, bade the irascible colonel good-day.

I have given this brief conversation as an introduction to the third and last volume of this series, entitled, “ Righting the Wrong.” ←

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